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BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

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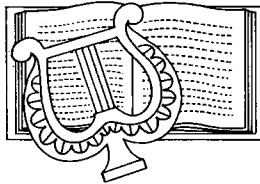
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# FOR HER LIFE

*A Story of St. Petersburg*

BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

AUTHOR OF

“MY OFFICIAL WIFE,” “CHECKED THROUGH,” “THE  
MASKED VENUS,” ETC.

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# FOR HER LIFE.

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## BOOK I.—IN THE TOILS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### DIMITRI TREPOFF'S TRUST OF HONOR.

There is nothing more suggestive of impending trouble in St. Petersburg, particularly in a very cozy bachelor apartment, than to have the lights suddenly extinguished in a melodramatic manner, by a frantically excited companion. And, to be also dragged into an inner room—the doors all quickly double-locked by the same individual—does not tend to compose the nerves of a Philadelphia lawyer upon his travels! Yet, this is what happened to me, Walter Grahame, Counselor-at-Law, in the eventful year eighteen hundred and eighty-three!

I knew well that it was none other than my chum, Major Dimitri Trepoff, of the Paul Regiment, but his singular actions greatly alarmed me. Essentially a man of peace, I had been so far, very conservative in my behavior upon a visit to Russia, which joined professional business with family affairs. "What is the matter, Dimitri?" I whispered, as I regained my composure. I could not even see his cigarette in the darkness—a sign of the most extraordinary pressure upon his mind.

"Grahame! unless you help me now, I am a ruined man! I am in danger! Get your coat on, and then we will slip out by the servants' door into the street! I may be followed, even now! Come at once!"

"Where are you going to take me?" I asked, with a certain internal shudder. He briskly said: "Just come along, I only wish I were as safe as you are!" And he failed in an attempt at a laugh—signally failed.

"It is already half past nine," I grumbled, "and I would sooner be on the gentle Schuykill than rambling over your desert of a capital, with its squares, half a mile long! I warrant it is only another of your high-pressure society adventures! Some tangled intrigue of a pretty woman, whose face you'll forget in a fortnight!"

"My God! Grahame! Don't jest! My very life is in danger, and my worst enemy is now on my trail!" His voice rang out in the agony of a man to whom I owed every family obligation.

"All right, then, I'm with you!" I muttered, and in five minutes we were striding along in the shadows of the huge piles of granite buildings. We had turned several corners before Dimitri hailed a passing droschky. "To the Winter Garden!" he cried, sharply, and then added some directions in a voice which caused the driver to dash madly away. Striking a fusee, he quickly examined his watch.

"Ah! yes! I have yet time enough!" he said, and wrapped his military cloak closely around him, for the first feathery flakes of the autumn snow were softly sifting down on the great city of Peter.

"What is the matter?" I said, in English, as I grasped his arm.

Major Trepoff pointed to the bewhiskered driver, and replied in the same tongue, "Wait till we are safe up there!" placing his finger on his lips. I observed him nervously twisting around, his furtive glances to see if we were being followed; and I was very glad to be soon safely under the well-lighted roofs of the Winter Garden, with its music, dames and motley crowds of pleasure seekers.

"Thank heavens!" I cried. "Any one can come here, without the slightest fear of being compromised—politically" It was true. The only dangers in this Russian Mabile were the bright-eyed condottieri of a dozen lands! In the gay groups of reckless dancers—among the loung-

ing promenaders—a dozen lands were represented by rosy free lances. There were black gypsy eyes, velvet as the sloe; pale, defiant-looking Austrians, eager, hawk-like Parisians—and all the flotsam and jetsam of the whole continent washed ashore at this Ultima Thule.

"I will bet a new hat!" I murmured, "that this romantic guardsman has for the fiftieth time in his gay and festive career drifted into a woman scrape!" But there was little time for reflection, as the tall grenadier dragged me along through the crowd, and entered a neat little eating booth. He had gazed for reference at a card he held in his hand. "Yes! yes! this is the place!" he sighed, and I then saw on an affiche, the modest appellation "Duc—Restaurateur."

"Here we are safe!" Dimitri Trepoff sighed, as he tossed aside his cap, cloak and sword. "I shall order a fowl and a bottle of wine," he whispered, "for appearances." I was struck with the change which had suddenly come over my debonnaire friend. In the five months of my extended intimacy, never before had his handsome, blonde face looked haggard, his eyes desperate.

Standing there before me, six feet of splendid, stalwart manhood, his breast gleaming with orders, rich, noble, in the perfection of early manhood, at thirty-three, the handsome major of the Paul Regiment was a star of the jeunesse dorée of his time. But the blue eyes were very haggard and haunted looking—his lips twitched nervously under the sweeping, golden mustache, and his hands were clenched, so that the half-dozen turquoise rings left deep red prints in his slim, white fingers. In fact, Major Trepoff was in a burning rage.

"By heavens, I could throttle him!" he growled, as he threw himself into a chair. There was a very ugly ring in his voice. "A duel!"

"Who?" I cried, in some alarm. "Now, what is it? Have you had a row with your chief, or is it a quarrel over one of those witching maids of honor at the Winter Palace?"

"It's a long story, this enmity, Grahame!" said Trepoff,



bringing out his treasured regimental cigarette case. "Ever since I was detached and made aide-de-camp to the Grand Duke, General Haxo has secretly followed one with his deadly resentment!

"At Shipka Pass, my battalion took and held a hill, which had been lost by his brigade. My poor men earned me my decorations, and also this post as aide to the Grand Duke Michael. General Haxo, as commander of the Military Police in Petersburg, can not often annoy me, for the Grand Duke's name passes me through all his vulgar formalities. And—you know the little affair of 'La Graziella,'"—I smiled—"That did not smooth his ruffled feathers! Now, Grahame, I want your advice—your help—your calm counsel—for Ivan Haxo has now the one chance of his life to effect my ruin! He will follow me like a sleuth hound! Of course, a duel with him is out of the question. My duties take me out of his sphere. While he has the ear of the Emperor—and waits on him daily—I have the protection of the Grand Duke. So, all these two seasons he has vainly dogged my path. There is but one way in which he can pay off the old scores—and that is to effect my final disgrace. And, now, devil take it!" cried the splendid young patrician, "I have been imprudent—damnably imprudent!"

Trepoff strode up and down the room, as the nimble garcon deftly spread the table. "Send me the proprietor," he sharply said. A little rotund waif of Gaul entered, with profound salaams; and lingering in a corner I could overhear their whispered colloquy in French.

Fixing my professional eye upon the landlord, I noticed the pallor which overspread his face as he scuttled away.

"Getting in deeper every moment," muttered Trepoff, as he locked the door, and drew his chair up near to mine. He laid his ready revolver on the table beside him, and then earnestly said: "Break a bit of bread, and taste the wine. We must do so to save appearances. It is only to cheat the waiter! Oh, it's all right," he gloomily said, glancing at the door. "They will come for me, when she is here!"

"See here, Dimitri!" I gravely remarked, "never for-

get that you are the head of your house. Think of our family connection; of your brilliant future career; of all you have to lose!" I was beginning to be afraid of his behavior, and the strange precautions which savored of dark lantern work. "You must remember the state of public feeling here, and all the dangers of the time! What are you drifting into?"

"I'm not drifting into anything! I have just tied a noose around my neck for that cruel devil to tighten—if he can only get hold of the loose end! I am 'in medias res' now. I would not ask you, a stranger here, Graham, to stand by me, but this thing is desperate, and Serge Zastrow is down at Cronstadt on his iron-clad! He couldn't get leave and be here in less than three or four days. And by that time the woman and I may both be—over there," he gloomily concluded, bending his thumb toward the gloomy fortress on the island. My teeth chattered.

"I knew there was a woman in the case," I said, with a triumphant air.

"Certainly there is. The very handsomest woman I ever saw in my life, too!" he continued, with enthusiasm. "And she is now in full possession of my apartment, and I have got to get her quietly out of there to-night. It may cost me my life if I do not. The police, I fear, are watching my rooms even now!"

I sprang to my feet. In his very rooms.

"This is astounding," I faltered. "What did you take her there for, Dimitri?" I demanded.

"I could not help it. It was to baffle Haxo and his bloodhounds. I am so well known in Petersburg I would have been lost if I had taken her to any public place!" he gravely said. "And I had no other ready refuge to offer her then," he gravely concluded.

"Who is she?" I asked, with a growing alarm which I could not conceal.

"I do not know! I haven't an idea! All I know," he cried, tossing away his cigarette, and striding up and down in a storm of emotion, "all I do know is that she is a friendless woman—and to me her life is now a trust of honor."

"You were very unwise to rush into such a strange guardianship," I hazarded, with a growing uneasiness for Dimitri's safety. Highly as he was placed, so he had only the more to risk—and his fall would be the more terrible! It would spread a cloud of doubt and distrust over our whole connection. For, alas, his great patron, the Grand Duke, was known to be merciless, as regarded any taint of disloyalty. The shadows of the assassination of the Emperor Alexander II. still hung as a gloomy pall over the Neva.

"Grahame! It is Fate,—Fate!" solemnly said Dimitri, his handsome face lit up with a mournful smile. "Do not forget that trifles rule us. Our future is determined by events of a puerile character. A rotten stirrup strap caused perhaps a change in the fate of France, when the Prince Imperial died under the Zulu spears in the cornfield. Napoleon's pork pie at the battle of Leipzig paralyzed the mind against which the whole world fought, in that Battle of the Nations. The chance glimpse of a pretty face placed Mademoiselle Eugenie Montijo on the greatest throne of the world for seventeen years. The falling down of the golden locks of the Scottish-Spanish lass, the imperial lover's glimpse of that wonder dream, in a lonely dressing-room, lost France, Alsace and Lorraine, and made the German Kaiser the modern Lord of the Sword. No, Grahame! We drift! Catching at straws, and—God knows whither this adventure will lead me. Perhaps to Siberia—or—the scaffold!"

"Great God, Dimitri! You have not compromised yourself with her? She is not a vile adventuress!" My blood ran cold. I quickly reflected upon the dangers to Dimitri of such an entanglement. Headlong youth!

"Oh! I am not guilty!" he bitterly said. "And, moreover, this woman does not wish to lead me away. She would even now, at the risk of her own life, brave all to leave me free." His breast was shaken with love's agonies.

He clutched my arm. "I must get her at once out of my rooms—get her away; get her out of Russia! Fate has strangely linked her safety to my own—and—I could never explain. I could not justify myself. There

is no time for such mere formalities here. The Grand Duke Constantine is the head of the Extraordinary Bureau now. I could tell you things which would freeze your blood. I dare not tell all I see,—all I know. I will not drag Serge Zastrow, either, into this! Cronstadt is now doubly watched. Think of the forty young naval officers arrested there,—some of them have suddenly disappeared.” His voice sounded gloomy and hollow, as he pointed across the Neva. “There is one building here, where scores go in, who only come out—at night—between four boards. Think of Lestaroff, hung simply because a visiting midshipman, a hare-brained young cousin, had left a portfolio in his rooms! Ah! no! It is for her life that I must fight; and,—for my honor!” The cold sweat stood out on his brow. I was astounded. Philadelphia rose up before me. Its sedate citizens slowly meandering along its slumberous thoroughfares. My peaceful haunts; my embattled law-books; my cozy club; my friendly social circle. In the face of Trepoff’s grimly-evoked specters I sighed, “Would I were with thee!”

“Positive I am!” I grumbled. “If this dare-devil Romeo gets out of this scrape, I will emulate the great Pennsylvanian McClellan—‘I will change my base!’—and, stand not in the order of my going!” I was badly rattled.

“You see, Grahame, you are the only man near me who can help me. An American,—a man of grave pursuits; a bachelor; a man who has nothing to explain, nothing to fear!” His compliment to my fearlessness provoked such a sickly smile that even Trepoff laughed heartily, for my fame had not been gained—“in the imminent deadly breach,” but in punishing others for breaches of contract, and sundry other laches. In fact, I had spent five months in the delightfully easy and pleasant official society of St. Petersburg, closing up the settlements of the building of the four Russian cruisers for use in Siberia, on the Atlantic coast. “Don’t forget, Trepoff, I will stand by you,—like a brick!” I remarked. “But, don’t forget also that I did not come over here to uproot your institutions; to butcher any of the royal



household. Neither, am I fond of chains." I blushed as I fondled the only chain I wear—presented to me by a staid maiden of the city of Penn, who fondly hoped to cast a gentle glow over the afternoon, evening and twilight of my serene and tranquil life. "Now, you know that I am not, and will not be, classed among the fire-eaters! 'Palmam qui meruit ferat!' With me the pen is mightier than all your swords. I wish to shed nothing but ink, in this weary world. What can I do for you!" The imperilling of my life for an unknown beauty seemed to have no "quid pro quo."

Trepoff stopped, fixed his eyes upon me, and calmly said: "You can take her away from my rooms to-night; and then, help me to hide her, or shield her, till I can get her over the frontier! For, I am not safe now, unless she gets away." It was a sweetly promising situation for an engaged man!

"And if you should be caught!" I said, gravely, for his face was very stern and sorrowful. I pitied the mournful lover. "Then I would have saved my honor, even if my life paid the forfeit!" he said, springing up, as a knock at the door recalled us. "Stay here!" he cried, ignoring my muttered impious remark. "Damned fantastic notion! Honor before Life! sounds very like the 'Three Guardsmen!'" But he continued: "I will see this woman here! It's nearly half-past ten! And then, I can explain, after we meet at my rooms. I have a plan to arrange for her safety—for to-night!" He darted out and left me alone. I mechanically drained half a flask of Burgundy as I wrathfully surveyed the growing entanglement. I lit a cigar and reflected upon the waywardness of Fate's frolics with mankind—the mere pawns of destiny. Trepoff's oldest brother, a retired Commander of the Navy, had spent some time in America, overseeing the construction of the four cruisers, at the Capes of the Delaware. He had improved that leisure by making me a sort of an American-Russian in feeling, when he married my sister Justine, and took her away from the polished door-knobs, green blinds, and glistening marble steps of Philadelphia, to preside over his beautiful estate of Mon Plaisir, near Kief. And so

this gallant freed officer of the Paul Regiment, had been a brother in heart to me during my siege of the Departments in successfully closing up the affairs of my American clients. I had looked forward to a charming winter in Paris, Rome, and Vienna, with my ward and pet sister Madeleine, who only awaited the spring's flowers to make a visit with me to Justine's beautiful retreat at Kief. I was in no mood for wild adventures. Justine was already in Paris, and our winter tour of travel was laid out. My demure Quaker maiden claimed me for a coming wedding. My business had admirably progressed, thanks to Dimitri Trepoff's ready aid, and the pleasant smoothing over of all the asperities due to his charming English and untiring friendly efforts. I hoped to see South Russia myself, for Justine had written me, "Our land will wear its mantle of snows; our forests are now bare; our trees leafless; our birds and roses fled with the blossoms of last year. But wait, wait, for the magic voice of spring! The breath of the rose makes the incensed air a delight; the birds sing never so sweetly, and all our plains and glades are starred with the blue forget-me-nots! You will have all this, and a Russian welcome!" As I preferred a few months with pretty Madeleine and the demure Justine, in the flowery paradise of Mon Plaisir, to arguing dry demurrers, in the very teeth of astute legal enemies. And so, I did not fancy Dimitri Trepoff's "deed without a name!" It looked wildly quixotic.

"Decidedly! I was not cut out for a conspirator!" I growled, as I saw the bottom of the bottle, and then followed Trepoff out of the room, without a word, when his eager face graced the doorway. I turned up my collar and pulled my hat over my brows. My lugubrious air was so comical that Trepoff laughed, "Come along, Grahame. You look like a chiffonier in love! It isn't as bad as all that!" And the light-hearted guardsman pulled me along through a crowd of smiling Aspasias, Phrynes, and Venus types of continental diversity, whose saucy eyes boldly challenged us to abide with them. It was evident that many of them knew Dimitri Trepoff, for wine, roses, and laughing love waited on that devil-

may-care young patrician's path. Our closed carriage was a far different affair to the open droschky we had at first used. I soon saw by the narrowed streets, the darkness, and felt by the roughness of the stones, that we were in by lanes of the huge octopus of the Neva. I had in my mind the Schuylkill and the Delaware, peacefully gliding, and I hugely preferred their gentle flow to "Abana and Pharpar—rivers of Damascus;" all the "sweet waters of the Golden Horn," or the dark flowing Neva, across which I could see the twinkling lights of the great fortress, with the tall church spires piercing the blue star-lit air. I glared at my dear comrade Trepoff, his eyes eagerly strained out in the darkness. I thought of a great Czar's son strangled there by the common executioner, while the mad genius Peter justified his deed over his cups. I shuddered, for the lonely woman now hidden in Trepoff's rooms, for the brave soldier whose headlong gallantry had won my heart, as well as gained an empire over the palpitating bosoms of countless of the gay dames of Russia; and I mournfully thought also of my own plight. It has been my rueful experience to be always considered as a reliable "stand-by," and to go through much toil and tribulation, in the varied affairs of other fellows, who have reaped all the plenteous harvest of gratitude,—laurels, roses, witching smiles, and myrtle,—while I have been left with—much experience of a varied order. "Trepoff!" I remarked; and I here tried to be impressive: "I don't exactly fancy this." "Hush!" he sharply said. "Keep quiet! Here she is!" And, as we paused a moment, in the angle of a dark corner, a woman glided into our carriage. A bulky bundle was in her hand! There was nothing in her manner to indicate aught above the working woman; her dress was that of the woman in the tiers état, but the glibness of her conversation, in half French, half Russian, with my companion! "Another mysterious woman!" I grumbled, as I resigned myself to an apparent doze in a corner of the vehicle. "I will ignore the whole affair!" I resolutely decided. "My connection with it, I will make of the very briefest character." A prediction of my foolish self-confidence, which was destined to be very ruthlessly de-

molished by untoward facts sweeping down on me, from the dark unknown, and towering over me, in the gloom of that night, like an iceberg over a doomed bark.

I felt from my brief survey, that the rich-voiced woman, now earnestly engaged in converse with Trepoff, was in the bloom of life and courage; and her alert manner indicated her to be a French woman. "I hope she will take the other one away—for good!" was my pious ejaculation. "It is not befitting a member of the Philadelphia Bar to be flying around at night, with gay guardsmen, mysterious dames, and on the ragged edge of dangerous conspiracy. I—"

Here I was stopped by a jolt of the carriage, as we drew up at Trepoff's splendid private quarters. "Quick! quick!" he flashed out. "Not a moment's delay!" The woman at my side sprang past us, and as the dvornik opened the doors of Trepoff's private stairway, in the great granite apartment house, she flitted up the stair, hooded and veiled. The grin of the house official was visibly broadened, as he stood there in a flood of yellow light, gazing sheepishly at me. There was evidently no Don Juan adventure in my own case; but I was tired and wearied. It was now past eleven. Still, I was not allowed to collect the legal mind. Trepoff drew me at once into his little smoking room. "Now, Walter," he said, and his face gleamed ghastly pale; "I have to risk my very life on your discretion—your honor! In two minutes a woman will be in the parlor, dressed in the clothes of the person whom we brought here! Will you go with her where she wishes to go, simply conducting her, in safety? You need not speak to her. I did not wish you to complicate yourself too far. In case of any questioning, I can tell you that she speaks English." I was paralyzed.

"And if we should be stopped or questioned?" I faltered. "Then," he said, solemnly, "let her decide on her own course! You are well known here to be a respectable foreigner, under the shadow of your legation. All that you have to do, is to remain silent. You could not get in any serious trouble to-night. She might be sacrificed! God help her!" he groaned. "But you are safe!



Don't wait a moment when she comes! Be sure to take another carriage! Pay this new man off, and then with another come back here! I will wait. I have already telegraphed to Serge Zastrow to come up at once."

What could I do in these premises? I mumbled something; and yet my words were unavailing. I had lost my court flippancy, for I could professionally gaze in the eye of the sternest American judge, without flinching. I knew, "off the bench," that these wearers of the ermine gambolled and disported themselves much,—very much; too much, in fact,—like other mortals. But I had never looked into the fishy blue eyes of a cold-hearted Russian judge, and, moreover, I did not care to. "Will you have a revolver?" said Trepoff, picking up one from his table of arms and various bachelor litter. "What for?" I blankly said. He smiled sadly, for he was well aware that I would not discharge it. Even upon bail! I sighed for just one half-hour of a Republican (or Democratic!) form of government. I would have used it to carefully secrete myself where neither Trepoff, his mysterious "charge of honor," nor the extra "woman in black," could find me, "with a forty-foot pole"—as we neatly remark in the Land of Penn. But I sprang up as the door slowly opened, and Major Dimitri Trepoff sprang tenderly to the side of a woman, whose face was now hidden in the double folds of a dark veil. Accustomed, I flatter myself, to quickly "take in surroundings," I observed that the new-comer lent a statuesque beauty to the dark-hued borrowed robes; that Major Trepoff had passionately kissed her two hands, which I could see were slender and daintily gloved, and that her step was as light as a snowflake when she followed me down the stairs. A last few words in Russian, exchanged with Trepoff, seemed to breathe the fond sigh of a parting soul. "This thing has made a considerable progress," I stubbornly murmured; as, raising my eyes, I saw Trepoff's face between the parted curtains. His own man had opened the doors for us! I gazed around, with a frightened glance, as I stepped up to the carriage door, and vainly tried to see the proverbial lurking "minions of tyranny" darting around in the weird per-

formances which such people affect upon the stage. I did not see any one gyrating about in that mysterious manner which forces all within a practicable radius, to observe the "sbirri."

"Alas! In the snug land of Peter, the "myrmidons" can scoop one up, gently, at will, at any time. If I flattered myself that I was unobserved, it was not the first time in my life that my vain imaginings have betrayed me. And so, I presume it will ever be, while I practice my delightful profession "upon this wrinkled sphere." I was both delighted and amazed, as we rolled out upon the brilliantly-lit Nevsky Perspectiv. We were safe—so far! Four Cossacks, mounted, on guard at the street corners, sitting motionless on their statuesque ponies, seemed to be selecting victims from the stream of passers-by. For, with a repeating carbine, a sword, a revolving pistol, a long dagger, and a twelve-foot lance, these forbidding-looking fellows seemed fitted up for "carnage in any form." I distrusted their too business-like air of readiness, and I particularly disliked the steel-blue gleam of their lance-heads in the crystalline night. "As far as I go, they might as well leave those things at home. They add nothing to the appearance of my friends from the Don and the Volga,"—so I mused. I was growing cheerful as we drove smartly down into the heart of the city. I even began to dismiss my fears, for I am of a cheerful temperament. "This masquerading lady will pass out of my life,—forever,—to-night!" I thought. "She has neatly disguised herself; she will give these people the slip; and she will only remain a graceful, nameless shade!" The very reputation of Dimitri Trepoff guaranteed that. There was something in her dainty presence—in the thrill of her near proximity; in the splendid ripples of her dark brown hair and the flash of her eyes—that told me she was both young and handsome! It is that charming division of Eve's daughters who usually get into all kinds of mysterious trouble I have noticed, even in my own sober career. I can also state that a devout faith, duly kept to the demure divinity then pondering, in Philadelphia, over my future (at least so I fondly hoped), had not kept me from a certain dash

of the man of the world. In this brief ride, while the eyes of my silent companion were flashed upon me, in mute appeal, I was aware of a deliciously compounded perfume which evidently was her royal personal affectation. I was in a semi-dream, yielding unconsciously to the feminine fascinations of this disguised beauty; I was analyzing all that I knew of Oriza, Lubin, Pinaud, Gosnell, Atkinson, and other deft compounders of toned fragrance, when the unmistakable sound of violent sobbing brought back to me the darkest overhanging clouds of sorrow, danger and trouble! Perhaps, even Death's dark wings were now unfolded to swoop down upon the graceful fugitive at my side! And so, my heart went out to her—at once!

I, Walter Grahame, advocate, of Philadelphia, can stand with equanimity many of the ills that flesh is heir to! The needless sorrows of a child, the bitter tears of a woman, always melt a heart, still very human, after years spent with the Pandects of Justinian; the pleasing reflections of Coke; the cheerful chirp of Blackstone, and the thrilling remarks (in four volumes, with copious notes) of Chancellor Kent! I do not, even now, recall my guiding purpose; but I do know, that I was very soon busied in the rashest and most earnest proffers of all that lay in my power to aid a woman whom I had as yet never even seen. My voice was heartfelt in its broken emotion. I only know that she spoke gratefully in return. Her words breathed like the summer wind stirring the forest! They echoed in my heart! The import of her replies; her mention of Dimitri Trepoff's name; even her caution, was of no avail. "I will do all I can! We will not desert you!" In my poor way, I was replacing the dashing soldier, and the presence of a soft-clinging hand sent the blood bounding through my professional veins! Far quicker, far happier, the tide moved than on the announcement of a "favorable verdict." I had for once forgotten the calm, pure stream of the law. The lights of Philadelphia had faded from my memory, when, to my utmost astonishment, we drew up before the great Italiansky Bazaar! It was still crowded with a thousand wanderers, gazing into its one

hundred shops under one giant roof. The Gastiny Dvor opposite, the great Cathedral of Kazan, and the Ministry of Justice were thronged with sentinels and police agents. "She cannot be afraid of anything, just at present!" I murmured, as I fumbled for some money, and then dismissed the coachman with an imperative gesture. A little hand was slipped within my arm, and I was promenading grandly down the interior of the Italiysky Bazaar, before I realized the purport of her hurried whisper, "Betray no concern! Come with me! I will leave you very soon!" We walked down the left side of the great passage, and then drifted back almost into the open doorway, where we had entered from the Nevsky. A quiver of her fingers tightening on my arm, showed me now and then that my veiled companion scented danger, as people craned their heads, all eagerly gazing under her doubled veil. For she could not disguise her queenly sweeping stride; her graceful outlines belied, too, the humble garb of the woman with whom she had exchanged dresses. A gay intrigue was the general verdict. "Here!" she whispered, as with a furtive glance, she turned into a neat little shop where a gilded sign, "Articles de Paris," was supplemented by a neat array of toilet furnishings in the two front windows, behind which, neat muslin curtains cut off the interior of the shop from the view of the hundreds thronging the Bazaar. "Ah!" I divined the reason at once. The fair patricians of Petersburg would fain be screened from the vulgar as they dally over the purchase of rouge, poudre de riz, Fay's veloutine, and all the fards of Ind, and beauty compellers of the dainty art preservative! But the one dark-robed shop girl within, simply flashed a single parthian glance at me, as I followed the mysterious unknown into the little room, behind the shop. When I had passed the portal, closed by a glass door, also muslin-covered, with tasty beribboned rosettes, I was speedily recalled to a sense of my new responsibilities.

The fair fugitive locked the door, and then, speaking in an intense agitation, grasped my manly arm with two little hands whose fingers sank into my flesh. I could

see that her nerve was failing; for she was tottering. I held her in my supporting arms, as she sank into a seat and then whispered, "Go now! But walk around the Bazaar, once or twice, and go out on the Italiansky Boulevard—not the Nevsky! Take a little fiacre, and stop a square from Trepoff's! For God's sake! linger near till you are sure that you are not followed! Drive around the town for a half an hour before going back to him! And when I give the word 'Now!' on your honor as a gentleman, keep your eyes closed, until the girl knocks! I have a signal for her. Now we part—perhaps forever! Never forget that my last words were, God bless you, brave American!"

"But, Dimitri!" I cried, siezing her trembling hand in mine. "He knows how to meet me, and where! He knows that my very life is his, for a grateful woman would give up her own sad life to save him, now! Ah! God! If they should suspect him—should arrest him! I will tell him all! I shall see him again! He will not be warned—be dissuaded!" She feared only for her lover.

"And you?" I muttered. "What is to become of you?" My own heart was beating unnecessarily fast. I had forgotten all those aphorisms of legal prudence which were my daily pride—in Philadelphia! But here I was, charmed by the self-pictured witchery of a strange woman's beauty. I was in Petersburg, and had been permeated with the strange intoxication which had made Dimitri Trepoff gage his name, reputation; nay, even his life itself, upon the worth of a chance-met Delilah! "Prison, torture, Siberia's horrors, a nameless grave, may await me," she said. "But my last prayer will be for Dimitri Trepoff! In my last hour, I shall see your own manly generous face! We must part now—it may be forever!" Her sigh was softer than the rustling of the drifting autumn leaf. "Never!" I cried. "You are in danger! I am his relative! His only comrade here, now! I go back to him! You shall be saved! and, I will help him!"

"If I could only leave Russia; if I could only throw off this pursuit!" she faltered. "There is but one man

alive, in Russia, who knows me! They told me that he was in the far Caspian! He alone could recognize and identify me! If I could but brave them,—could pass that shadow line of doom, the frontier,—then,—I am young, the world is wide, and life is still sweet! If that one man is not here, I may baffle them yet.”

“Listen!” I cried, grasping her two wrists. “I will aid Trepoff! I am going out of the country soon, to join my sister in Paris! I will stand by him, and stand by you! He knows your story—the reason of your strange plight!”

“All that I dare tell him!” the beauty I had mentally pictured, sobbed. “All I dare tell him, without imperiling his honor, without exposing all of a woman’s frantic rashness,—not her shame, not her crime! I am guiltless of the blood of man, of craving for it! I stand here, perhaps a sacrifice—a voluntary self-sacrifice—to help the helpless! God help us all!” she moaned. “Now, you must go!” she murmured. “At any moment I might be seized even here! And you!”

“I will go,” I hoarsely whispered, “when I have once seen your face. Trepoff says that I must now stand by him to the death! Let me see the face, for which that gallant man would die, that I may know you here on earth again!” “Or, in the next world!” she said, in a smothered voice, with her slender hand upon her dark veil. “Listen now, and obey!” she replied, with the faint ring of a distant coquetry, the charm of woman’s easy empire, in her splendidly modulated voice. Its accents thrilled me to the very heart. “I will trust you, as I do that other noble heart! As I have to face my foes, I should not fear a true friend! Remember what I said. When I say ‘Now!’ close your eyes, and—obey!” I kissed the little fingers which trembled as she held the heavy folds of the veil, and hastily cried, “I promise!” “On the honor of an American!” she softly said. “I do!” I eagerly answered. My pulses were throbbing wildly. Even a lawyer’s heart can thrill!

With one sweep of her hand, she drew aside the thick veil, and all the glowing soul of the woman was flashed on me, as her beautiful wistful face was mantled with a

tender smile! Her parted lips, her tender dark eyes, her rose-shaded cheek, were lit up with all the glamour of the early springtide of womanly loveliness. She whispered, "Tell him I shall dream of him to-night—shall pray for him!" I was silent, spell-bound; and the soft whisper, "Now!" closed my eyes upon the picture of a beauty which has ever lingered in my heart since that eventful night. I heard nothing but a slight click, a gliding sound, the murmur "God bless you!" and, it seemed an age until a sharp knock woke me from a wild dream! I sprang to the door! With nervously trembling fingers I opened it, and one glance told me that the room was vacant. My beautiful charge had vanished! There was nothing now in sight, save the glass cases filled with the mysterious gallipots of Pinaud and his confreres. "We are about to close!" remarked the young shop woman, in the familiar accents of Paris. I gazed about me. On a chair lay a pair of little gloves. I had seen them on the slender hands which swept aside that disfiguring veil. "A last token that you are not a sweet dream, I will take them, for Trepoff!" I muttered as I thrust them deep in my bosom. And the faint lingering favorite perfume of the vanished one was with me once more as I hid the dainty gloves. She seemed to be an embodied love dream!

In a vacant dazed manner I followed out her strict injunctions. I heard the bells clang out midnight, as I rolled away along the Italienskaia. I mumbled some useless orders, and I was far beyond the Anitchikoff Bridge, and driving along the Troitsky Perspectiv. before I asked myself "Where the dickens did she vanish to? She could not hide herself in a fan case, or a powder box!" It was not the only mystery of my Petersburg life!

Lights were gleaming in Dimitri Trepoff's grand apartment, "au premier," as I briskly walked down from the canal bridge, where I had left my isvostchik staring at his "crazy Englishman" who gave him unsolicited a double-fare! The Russians of the lower order seem to fancy that all foreigners are bereft of their senses,—a compliment heartily returned by the outside barbarians.

I ran by the sleepy Dvornik, with the snap salutation, "Barin domo?" He was back on his sheep skin rug, and curled up before I joined the anxious Trepoff; whom I found prancing the room like a tiger.

Professionally, I detest all hurry and impatience. It was very late; I was tired and chilled. A cup of strong coffee and one of Trepoff's own superb cigarettes, however, enabled me to minutely detail the occurrences of my secret trip to the Bazaar. Dimitri was pale. "This house is watched,—now!" he quietly said, as he rose and swept back his tangled locks, with a nervous hand. "I am glad you got away so promptly!" "And what have you done with the extra woman,—the other?" I remembered his strange woman assistant in this dangerous masquerade. Trepoff laughed heartily. "I sent my man out, and had a closed carriage wait a couple of blocks away, on the corner of the Jardin Alexandre. With her bundle, the woman you left here, then sallied out, and was stopped and closely questioned. Alone, at the late hour, her story was that of a returning dressmaker going home after a day's hard toil. My own man drove her to a distant nest, at a friend's house! And so, I had a report that she is all right. Nothing can be feared from her. She has papers, and a home. And, the truest of the true!"

"Who is she, Dimitri?" I questioned. He fixed his eyes on me. "Her name is Marie Durand. She is the wife of the restaurateur, the keeper of the place where we supped at the Winter Garden." A light broke upon me. It was a secret haunt of a nameless clan!

"And the proprietor of the shop in the Bazaar, 'Articles de Paris?' etc., etc. "Precisely!" he said, dryly. "You have guessed it! It is a busy family!"

"Look here, Dimitri!" I remarked impressively. "You are getting into very deep water here! Yes, very deep water!" I relapsed into a shrouded gloom. The late hour, the fatigue and unwonted excitement, and the sense of "certain obligations" far away over the Atlantic's green rolling billows sobered me. Romance ceased to claim me as her child! And the wonderful witching eyes were no longer shining star-like on me. They



were only shining in Dimitri Trepoff's soul, for I had handed him the gloves, without a word! Her mute token! Her hand!

"You will not abandon her!—nor desert me in this matter! I dare not use Serge Zastrow's help openly! But, Grahame, there must be discovered a safe way out! I have sworn to aid her in crossing the frontier! And you will help me?"

I paused. "You know her story, or think you do!" I said severely. The magic glow was failing rapidly; her face had faded behind the clouds of this exciting night. "I know all that she would entrust to me, now!" he devotedly answered. "The rest, I will know some day!" he vigorously cried. "And, if you are separated?" I dubiously asked. "I will follow her to the end of the earth, to listen to her, when she calls me back to her!" the guardsman said. "And, if you are being deceived?" I hazarded. Dimitri Trepoff stopped before me, and his eyes glowed in a strange, fierce fire. "I will risk my life on that woman's honor!" he cried, as his eyes silenced all my cautious objections. I had found once more my semi-professional manner. "You are risking your grade, your very future; perhaps even your life!" I remarked, "for her, already! Suppose that you tell me how she so suddenly became your trust of honor!"

"I will tell you briefly," he said, throwing himself into a chair, and covering his face with his hands. "I was on duty at the Marble Palace this afternoon, in waiting upon His Highness, who was attending the public levee of his princely brother, the Grand Duke Constantin Nicolaievitch. My own carriage was in waiting at the private entrance, and I was at alone in the aide-de-camp's room; for I had been dismissed, as the Grand Duke purposed to remain and dine with his brother! The spectacle of a beautiful half-fainting woman, wandering into the room, and sinking half-fainting in a chair, startled me beyond all measure! I had hardly sprung to her side, and said in French, 'You are ill, Madame! Can I be of assistance?' when she murmured, 'I am lost, if I remain here! Help me to leave this palace!—at once!—for God's sake! as you are a man!'

"I was astounded! The gravity of the times flashed over me! You know, Grahame, that dozens of people have disappeared from the streets,—from the very salons here,—and no tales of their dark travels have ever again reached the broken hearts of friends! There was such an appalling agony in her face that I said, "I have a carriage of my own here! Will you allow me?" Seizing my pelisse and sword, I hurried her down the private staircase! The two sentinels presented arms as I hurried her to my carriage. She had muffled her face in fear. As I closed the door, and mechanically nodded to my coachman, he lashed the horses, and then I peered through the rear window! There were two men standing on the steps at the foot of the covered arcade, and gesticulating wildly. One, I recognized at once, as my enemy, General Haxo, who was present at the fête, as chief of the military police. The other, was also in a General's uniform. I fancied, at first, they were only calling to their coachman, but, when the sentinels began to run in our direction, I cried through the tube, to Ivan: 'Home as fast as you can!' The woman at my side was now in a swoon of fright. Her fears were quicker than my eyesight. I was undecided as to what I should do, when we had turned out of the glare of the lights of the Palace Square into the evening darkness of the streets. She was in a storm of sorrow, and her tears and sobs rent my soul.

"You have seen her, Grahame! The terror on her face unmanned me! I listened in a dream to the few sentences which she whispered. 'I must be alone! I must have shelter till I can communicate with my friends!' she said. Now, I dared not drive her to any public place! I feared she might swoon again. 'I live at some distance,' she said. 'I am in the gravest trouble; and, I must communicate at once with my friends, before I go home! It is my life!'

"It suddenly flashed on my mind that the safest place for her was in my own apartment. My trusty old Sergeant never leaves my rooms while I am away. I was obliged to return to the Palace in two hours, at the expiration of the dinner. That would disarm all suspicion.

I offered her the shelter of my apartment, and then told her frankly of my duties. 'I can send my man out for you with any message. He is faithful to the death!' I cried, for I could not bear to abandon a lonely human being, in her evident fear and terror, to such a fate as awaits the victims of the Repression Laws! Guilty or innocent, she was yet a woman. My strange ward!"

"Arrived at my apartment, the entrance was effected fortunately. The dvornik had left the doors all unlatched, and, he never turned his head as we passed up the stair. In fifteen minutes, old Sergeant Ivan was gone with her message and a parcel to be left at the Italiansky Bazaar. The very place which you visited with her! When the carriage dashed away, she seemed to have gained a new life. Before the old man had returned with a brief scrawl, which she burned in my own presence, she had told me what I must not even tell you now—as to the necessity of her escaping unseen.

"I insisted upon her gaining a needed rest, and then having some refreshments. It was only by hiding her in charge of my devoted old body servant, until my return, that I gained her consent not to dare to venture forth till my return from the Marble Palace. My presence for fifteen minutes with my chief was the close of my daily duties. My excited mind was in a whirl as I regained the Marble Palace. I was careful to enter the palace by the grand stairway, for the levée was over. When I was dismissed by my chief, with orders to report at orderly hour to-morrow, as usual, at the Staken-schneider Palace on the Neva, I walked down again to the Aide-de-Camp's room to find my cigarette case, which I had left behind in my hurry. Face to face, I then met the cold-faced martinet, General Ivan Haxo, and with him a cavalry General, a man I don't know. He's a half-Polish fellow, just back from the Caspian; a staff General now, so I am told."

Trepoff paused, and gloomily twisted a fresh cigarette. He resumed with a sigh: "I could not help but hear these words as I entered, 'It was she, one face in a thousand! I've good reason not to forget!' The moment I came on them, Haxo fixed his eye steadily on mine.

"‘I beg pardon, Major Trepoff; were you on duty here this afternoon, at the levée?’

"‘I was,’ I replied, as calmly as I could, for the stranger General was eyeing me superciliously from head to foot, and Haxo did not even introduce him. I knew, then, it was only a matter of duty.

"‘Did you see any one—any strange lady—lurking here in these rooms this afternoon?’ he continued.

"‘I fail to understand you, General,’ I answered, with some coldness.

"‘It is a matter of simple duty,’ he significantly said. ‘A suspicious person was observed moving in this direction! She could not have otherwise escaped. The utmost importance is attached to finding out the reason of her presence in this palace!’

"‘I saw no suspicious person!’ I boldly answered.

"‘She could only have left by this private door!’ the stranger General calmly said, in a sneering voice; and, then, Haxo flatly demanded, ‘Who was the lady who drove away with you in your own carriage.’

"‘Seeing that I was discovered, with two pairs of muscovite eyes resting upon me, I said, ‘It was a lady relative of my own, whom I sent in my own carriage to her home.’

"‘Ah!’ quietly said Haxo, as he held up a handkerchief. ‘She was unfortunate enough to lose this!’ He presented it to me with a low bow. “Now, Grahame,” said Trepoff, “I see trouble ahead! Get you home! I’ll see you at your rooms early in the morning. You know all the need of my concealing this woman’s identity—wait for me at your rooms!” And, I slept none that eventful night.

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## CHAPTER II.

### HER DANGEROUS FRIENDS.

"Now, Grahame!" said the handsome Major, next morning, as he achieved a hasty breakfast, long before I had finished my dressing. "I must be on the alert! I

may hear of this awkward thing at orderly hour. If the Grand Duke speaks to me about it, I must beware! One foolish word—one false motion—and I am lost! I feel, I know, this poor hunted one's friends are dangerous! I dare not be the means of communicating with them! I will not, now, tell you that she, Hermione—for her name is Hermione—trusted to me, alone, last night, before I sought your ready aid. Suffice it to say, that she was forced to go into the Marble Palace to meet a person who had an important message for her, on which her safety and her departure from Russia depended; where, by hazard, she became the object of a sudden veiled pursuit. Her very life depended upon instantly leaving the ill-chosen place for her conference! Still, the great halls of the Royal Palace, at a public levée, are supposedly open to the public world of all loyal Petersburg! Now, I can not yet say," gloomily said Trepoff, "if any of Haxo's smart underlings have marked me down after leaving the archway with her in my carriage. The soldiers, spies, and secret agents, all know my face. I must! I will, save her! I dare not now go to the Italiansky Bazaar. I count on you, at least until Serge Zastrow is here. You must act as my friend—as a life saver—as this woman's friend!"

"Dimitri!" said I as I gazed at his bright, enthusiastic face, over which the shades of feeling played rapidly, "I ask but one thing, how do you know that you are not being made the unwitting agent of deadly schemes in this?"

"She has given me her word of honor. She has laid her hand on the cross!" he cried, "and sworn that her only object in life is now to peaceably leave Russia, and that she has no further trust, no burden, upon her mind and soul! I can not, I will not, abandon her!" he swears. "She has been with me in my dreams all the livelong night!"

"I understand you, then!" I cried, as I rose and passed out into the cold, wintry morning. It was a hopeless case with Trepoff. He was a sworn knight now. The streets were covered with a thin, ragged fall of snow. "I

am then to help you to effect her safe departure from this land of snows?"

"You must aid me," he replied, "or else she is lost! I can not rest until I know that she is far over the line. And you alone must help me, for I shall be watched perhaps for months—for years! If the confidence of the Grand Duke is broken, then I am lost, and so I must save her now to save myself! I can have Serge help me later,—but, as I am tied down, I need your instant aid—to save her—to preserve myself. No suspicion can attach to you, Walter!" he said, fondly—and, he then closed with a very neat compliment to my professional character,—my eminently prudent course in Petersburg society,—and the perfect freedom of movement which I enjoyed, as a citizen of a great and glorious Republic! Flattered by the voice of this military charmer, moved by his concern for the comet-like vision of vanished loveliness, and, led on by some strangely roused chivalric feeling of my own, I said, "Dimitri, I will see you through this!—and,—stand by her,—for her pleading womanly eyes have brought conviction to my heart! Foolish, perhaps,—but, a bad woman, never!"—and,—these words occurred to me many times, in all their import, before the city on the Schuylkill engulfed me, a legal unit among the forensic band who ornament its classic halls. Hermione was now a trust of my honor—as well as her ardent swain.

"Then, I will sally out! show myself! I will spy on the enemy!" he gayly cried, for his spirits had instantly risen. "And, after I am done with my orderly hour, I will return and tell you what you have to do!"

It was noon! My table was covered with the litter of my correspondence and I had finished my day's work, when Trepoff entered, and, throwing down his sword, saluted me with a tranquil brow. He watched me as I finished a letter to my sister Madeleine in Paris, preparing her for a considerable delay in my projected return.

"I have just received a telegram from Serge Zastrow!" said he. "It will be up to-night. To save you all political responsibility, I will speak to him, in confidence,—and you are supposed to know nothing of this, for the present,

—as far as he goes! For he, too, is a Russian,—and has a head to lose!”

“And, how went the orderly hour?” I asked, with a secret inquietude.

“Oh! the Grand Duke was unusually gracious! Grahame! It is not to-day or to-morrow I fear!” said Trepoff, becoming serious. “You do not know the Russian character! Quiet—sly—patient—subtle—long suffering,—still they never forget. Now, Ivan Haxo may not dare to begin to undermine me, at once, with the Grand Duke! But, he will watch me like a sleuth-hound! The bolt will fall when I least suspect it. To be dismissed from the personal suite of the Grand Duke, would only be the military disgrace of a season! But, Haxo desires to trap me,—if I am recklessly foolish,—and then pay off all his old scores at once! He is a cold devil!”

“Then you must be very careful in all your movements for the present!” I replied, “and I do not see how you can personally communicate with your bewitching trust of honor!”

Trepoff laughed. “As usual, the dangerous part is the easiest! What I do fear, is the result of overconfidence, of that day by day self-beguiling, which wrecks all love intrigues finally,—ruins the courtier,—betrays state secrets, and wears out all defensive armor! I shall have abundant tidings from the woman I have sworn to shelter! Marie Durand is able and cunning! She will find a thousand ways to bear Hermione’s messages and tidings to me! I can always reach her husband’s booth at the Winter Garden! I have this morning destroyed every single personal letter which I had in my rooms! I have left only my military correspondence! Old Elia, my henchman, is there, hidden where he can see if my rooms are searched in my absence! Oh! I am all ready now to meet the enemy!” he laughed. “My own castle is all right! It is my external movements I fear now. I shall be very conspicuous in my usual haunts for a week! To-night, there is a masked ball at the Winter Garden! I shall be a bright star there! Serge Zastrow will go with me, and he can watch over me! I will be prepared for any apparently accidental ren-

contre with the police. So, I may throw them off the track. I must hoodwink them! I must play a new game—on my own account!”

“You will meet her there,—the veiled lady?” I questioned. He smiled. “Perhaps! Now, Walter, I am going to test your patience! I have a skeleton scheme already forming in my brain! I shall keep away from you for a few days,—and let Serge Zastrow take you around the city with him a little! Should you be brought near Hermione again, I do not want our two faces to be familiarized as comrades in the eyes of Haxo’s watchers! The cardinal point is that you should not be identified with me at all in this matter; your own mistakes would be easily excused. But, I can not again risk myself in public with Hermione! It would be madness! You have nothing whatever to fear to be seen at any place, here, day or night! A stranger’s inexperience robs his movements of all suspicion in this easy-going town!—especially where he can not speak the language, for any blunder is natural! All I wish you to do,” he said, seriously, “is to hold yourself free to instantly help us,—after Serge and I have examined the whole field! He knows every inch of the Baltic, the Gulf of Bothnia, and the Gulf of Finland! He has that practical good sense of the sailor which is proverbial. I only wish that I had his cool nerve and sound head!” Trepoff ruefully concluded.

“You make up in sentiment what you lack in sense, then,” I retorted. It was true. “Why not get him to try and smuggle her away,—by water?” I eagerly cried. I saw a fleeting vision of the lovely incumbrance, gazing back at the receding shores of Cronstadt! “It would be very desirable,—and, water leaves no trail!”

He gloomily said: “Alas! It is impossible. Spies swarm on every craft, and any outgoing vessel could be easily stopped at Revel! Besides, the captain of the ship would be responsible. If any one, if any of the family risks a life,—a career for this unhappy wanderer, the woman whose face haunts me, I am bound in honor to be that man!”

“You are right!—she looks to you alone! And, Fate



has joined your future! Why not try the interior?" I hazarded.

"Nonsense! You do not know our country life! She would have to have a proper traveling passport! Some family would be always responsible for harboring her! The very first step of the cunning country police officials would be to pounce upon her,—and,—detain her! Once in their clutches, she would be sent back here,—and never released until her whole history was unraveled! No! That would be absolute ruin to us all!"

"There are only two courses," he continued; "the one is for her to remain in hiding here, and trust to the passing over of this incident at the Marble Palace; the other,—a well-connected plan to assist her over the frontier into Europe by land. And, there you might succeed where we would fail!"

"Is she safe at present?" I demanded of Trepoff.

"Alas!" he said, quietly. "She is deeply in the toils! Her dangerous friends,—true to her,—are themselves all in daily danger! Many of them move around here,—and change lodgings every twenty-four hours. It is a desperate life! You may know that a fine woman nature, emotional and ardent, breaks down often under a long continued strain! The imprudence of any one of her dangerous friends might suddenly bring about a wholesale descent of the police. No! There is but one way! It is for her to personate some character in which she can leave Russia! The ordeal is a brief one! Not more than two days! You, Serge, and I, are a circle of three—and—if I can keep up her courage, if she is only safe and ready—then, a rift in the clouds may quickly show us the way out.

"Now, Grahame!" he cried, hopefully, "trust to me! Show yourself at Departments to-day,—go to the theater this evening! Watch all things carefully and observe narrowly if you are followed! I will call here with a carriage, and bring Serge, to-morrow, at eleven o'clock! We will all drive over to the Island, and breakfast! By that time, I shall have grave news for you. I will see her to-day if it kills me! I must! Two things I ask you! One is, to be as gay and trifling in your manner and

amusements as your legal decorum will allow! The other is, to avoid my house,—the Italiansky Bazaar,—and the Winter Garden, until I permit you. So you will be a hidden reserve force! Serge and I will concert some sensible measures. And, to-morrow morning I will have news for you! I trust to his sailor wit!" So Trepoff vanished, and I knew it was to gaze into the eyes which had enslaved him.

The day's occupations seemed strangely long to me,—and the charms of St. Petersburg society were fading very rapidly on my mind! The frank confessions of Trepoff as to the uncertainty of social life, and the helplessness of the individual under the stern police régime increased my mental uneasiness! "Anything to get away, and,—as soon as possible," I mentally resolved. "If two influential and patrician blood relatives,—sworn comrades from boyhood, can not aid this rash and helpless woman,—what can I do,—but only blunder along, and, perhaps, suffer with them!" I felt keenly the hindrance of my ignorance of the language,—my helplessness to describe the wiles of any hidden enemies,—and, a dozen times, I was tempted to send my passport and have it viséed for my departure, "within three days," via Wirballen! Once over the Prussian frontier, at Eydtkuhnen, I would be safe! And, it was only twenty-six hours away! I was sorely tempted.

My ardor of the previous evening ebbed slowly away,—and I organized a debating society, of which I was myself the moderator, and heard,—with very little satisfaction,—Walter Grahame, Esq., of the Philadelphia Bar, argue the case *pro* and *con*! Logic and self-interest weighed for my instant departure! And, I acknowledged, as I laid my tired head down to frightful dreams, that a mere vain pride,—that pride which holds up the shivering duellist, the false pride which forces vain man onward into all dubious paths, had bound up my own honor, too, in an engagement fully as foolish as Trepoff's.

And yet,—he in risking his very life,—I in imperiling my cherished peace and liberty, we were both led on merely by the summons of two pleading, bright eyes,—the witchery of a fair woman's beauty, armed in its help-

less appeal to manly chivalry,—and that subtle feminine charm, which draws men, steeled to all other temptations, far away from the beaten path of self-interest! And yet, I reflected that the mere egotist, would go on through the world only a mail-clad Diogenes,—a mere inert statue, gazing out unpityingly through the visor of a cold selfishness! I was not comforted in reflecting that “Beauty draws us by a single hair,” when I joined my two friends, and the sleigh dashed away over the new-fallen snow, in the arctic gray of the morning. I was clearly “in for it now.” Dimitri Trepoff pressed my hand very significantly,—and, the conversation was strictly confined to banalities! There were dark rings around Trepoff’s eyes, and his face was drawn and strained, with an intense restless emotion! Painful repression seemed to be the order of the day, in his warring thoughts! Even that hearty young sailor, Captain Serge Zastrow, was strangely silent and reserved! His athletic figure,—bronzed cheek,—and glowing dark eyes marked the daring child of sun and storm! It was easy to credit his rapid advance in the Navy due to the most desperate gallantry on the Danube in the destruction of the Turkish fleet! My busy days and his important command at Cronstadt had left us only on the threshold of a friendship. But, as his frank face was turned to me, the glance of his troubled eyes showed me that he well knew I shared Dimitri’s unwelcome dangers! We were “three of a kind!”

While I watched the strange and varied sights of the great city, Captain Zastrow’s eyes were cast now and then behind us! “We are followed, Dimitri!” he whispered, in English. “I will soon see who it is!” growled Trepoff, as we turned into the Champs de Mars. “Drive around once!” ordered the Guardsman, as the troika swept along. “There!—that’s the same sleigh!” muttered Zastrow, pointing out a superb team of blacks. We had swept around a corner, and the equipage had dashed on toward the Place Souvorov.

As we passed down on the Troitsky bridge, the suspected equipage drew swiftly past us, and took the driveway in advance! The expression on Trepoff’s face was

devilish, as a gigantic, black-bearded officer cast a stony glance at us, when they swept by! My own face was covered with a bashlik to ward off the Borean blast,—but Zastrow and Trepoff were in their uniform! “So!” he quietly said, as Zastrow’s eyes were fixed on him in triumph; “you were right! Ivan Luboff, again! He will be wearied, though, if he dogs me for the next month! I will lead him a devil’s dance!” But, Serge Zastrow shook his head gravely. “Dimitri,” he said, “Haxo has chosen his instrument well! You are in great danger! Now, Colonel Ivan Luboff, sub-chief of the Military Police of St. Petersburg, is a man whose presence you can not resent, anywhere! For, salons—society—and all resorts are open to him, upon his mere rank and functions! I doubt if any one in the capital would dare to refuse to him an invitation,—any one below the rank of the Grand Dukes,—I mean! Who was with him? I only saw a General’s insignia on the overcoat!”

“I can not say!” gloomily replied Trepoff. “He is a dangerous fellow,—this Luboff,—and,—unfortunately, His Highness, the Grand Duke Constantine, is as fond of Luboff as my chief is of me! So, it’s one Grand Duke against another, for influence. If he follows us to a restaurant,—after last night,—the fact of a vigilant watcher on my every movement, is assured. You say that you saw the same sleigh, dog us all the morning?”

“Ever since we left your house!” quietly answered the sailor. An ominous sign!

In apparent unconcern, we drove up to the nearest restaurant on the Island. “You had better play host, Walter!” whispered Trepoff. “It will leave us free to watch these two men dogging my footsteps! Take a table in the open room, for there we can talk in a low voice, and no one can overhear us!” While I busied myself with the social duties now devolved on me, Captain Zastrow returned from the gallery, his shoulders twitching.

“They have just driven up!” he said, in a low tone.

“Well!” doggedly replied Trepoff, “it is now a duel to the death! And, my hands are tied by my well-known face and my public position. What shall we do?” he groaned.

Seated at the central table of a large open room, with no parties near us, we felt safe for the moment. "Let us laugh and joke and drink a couple of bottles of wine!" remarked Dimitri. "Though they have gone at once into a private room, we will be certainly watched here! Who is with him?" questioned Dimitri of his cousin.

"I could not see the face! It's a cavalry General! His pelisse collar was turned up over his face! I can't see his interest in this!" growled Serge.

"Tell me of last night, Trepoff," I said, with a devouring anxiety.

"Well, I will be brief," remarked the Guardsman. "My room was neatly searched by four agents de police, who turned out the old Sergeant, and covered their tracks by officially going over the whole house! There was nothing compromising found in my rooms! These ministers of darkness simply came and went! It was a case of a regular domiciliary visit. But, Serge and I,—were followed, during every movement of the evening,—until I reached home at half-past two! I was very careful to have a double domino! I also made myself very attentive to a gay little dancer who was provided for me by that smart soul Marie Durand! The real person I went to see, had been all afternoon hidden there, and, after my conference, in which I changed dominos twice in the dressing rooms of Durand's Restaurant,—I reappeared, in my usual black domino, and then took Serge and the little figurante into supper in the open room of Durand's booth. Before I returned, I knew that Hermione was safe in her hidden retreat. I now know all of her story that 'honor' will allow her to tell me or me to listen to! That she has no compromising papers, no present connection with any blood enemies of the Czar! Her one fatal imprudence has led her into the hands of her dangerous friends, who are now loyally risking their very lives to shelter her! Fate has given a double secret to her and myself,—and,—she has the strictest faith to guard toward those, whom I dare not and would not meet! So, Walter, I must now, to save her, try and save myself,—and yet, I must stand back! I will need the help of both you and Serge! So we must confer frankly to—

gether. It is only as a watchful trinity we can succeed!"

"It seems to me, Dimitri, that you will only expose yourself and her to a double doom, by meeting her again, clandestinely!" said Serge Zastrow. "I am known to be your bosom friend! I will be, also, watchful. And, my leave is short! So, that on our friend Grahame, here, hangs the woman's destiny, and perhaps your own life. He must be the go-between! He must play a dangerous part, for a short time! If I could only stay! But, Trepoff, you must not ruin all by your fond rashness!"

In the intervals of our enforced merry-making, we exchanged a few words of mutual cheer. The sailor's frank brow was clouded. "You tell me she is too conspicuously patrician for an apparent seamstress or governess! I am trying to study out a quiet retreat for her! The haunt she is in, may be discovered any day! In the very teeth of the police. I could hide her in the shops, if she were commonplace, but you say——"

"Ah! no one could mistake her for a paid dependent!" was a singular coincident reply of Trepoff and my own.

"Then there is but one desperate chance! one only!" resolutely said Zastrow. "Old General Komaroff, at Warsaw, is my god-father! The Countess and her daughter Vera are coming up soon, on a visit of a month to my old uncle, General Zastrow! I can see Vera"—and then, a slight blush reddened on his tanned cheek. "Her father will deny her nothing! If she will write to him, he can get me a month's leave, on a pretense of family affairs! I must find the hunted woman a safe hiding place! Perhaps even at Uncle Zastrow's! The dear old boy is almost blind! His wife is the very simplest of mortals! You must strain every nerve to baffle Haxo—my dear old boy!" the sailor whispered to Trepoff. "When the Komaroff ladies go back to Warsaw, this strange beauty, could go on in their train, and, Grahame here, could then take her over the frontier! It is only six hours farther! Any one in the train of the Komaroffs is perfectly safe from all espionage. General Komaroff commands at Warsaw. They have never met Grahame! He will be received with open arms, on your account, and your brother's! I will find the way! I could easily hide her

there in the Zastrow house; I know it from boyhood, but, then, the servants! They can not be long deceived! True it is,—they are the masters here,—and a single word to the police would bring down a quick ruin to all! Ah! what a responsibility!" He glanced at the hollow-eyed lover.

"Yes! Serge! They hang as a cloud of spies around every family table!" groaned Trepoff. His agitated face,—his mute suffering was such that I cried in a pleading whisper:

"Let us leave here! You will surely betray yourself! And,—then leave her friendless! I will stand in with you—to the last! Cheer up!"

"Bravo!" muttered Zastrow. "Then, Grahame, you and I will find the way out for her! One thing I do insist on," he said; "Dimitri does not go near the Italian-sky Bazaar! For, it is true—that—Love is blind!"

"Some one must go there to-night! She is breaking her heart in the fear of calling down the police on those who now shelter her,—and also of my taking some undue risk! Zastrow can not go! My God! and I—I—must play the coward!" faltered Trepoff.

I clasped his hands warmly. "Don't worry, Dimitri!" I was emboldened to say. "I will go and keep your tryst! Do you quietly turn now and simply watch Luboff! Keep him busied! Throw him off the track! Let the Durand find you some fresh-faced, romantic woman to aid in your semi-public hide and seek! If Captain Zastrow gets his leave,—and furnishes the retreat, I will find out a 'Yankee plan' to effect her quiet departure! It is written in the stars! But here, I say, no one can be trusted but one of the ladies of the Komaroff family! And,—in some way,—as an apparent companion,—the lady whom you call Hermione, must go to Warsaw with them! After that,—I will boldly take her on over the frontier,—I would always have something to fall back on to save myself! For, I am an American and a stranger!"

"I see the clouds lifting!" whispered Zastrow. "Pay your bill now, Grahame, and let us go! We will all dine at Donon's! A private room there is safe! I am known to all there! So is our own relationship, Dimitri! We

will talk our new plan over at your rooms, Grahame; and then, from Donon's you can make your descent upon the Italiansky Bazaar! You can return there and report, and we will separate for the night! Dimitri can send word to this Durand woman, by you, to meet him when he will! And, besides, his flirtation with some mysterious pretty girl of the city here, will serve to confuse this lumbering scoundrel Luboff! There he is now!"

And so, laughing and chatting, we passed out within a dozen yards of the man who was doing his best to bring the handsome Guardsman down to shame!

"Yes! it's Haxo's dirty work! You villain!" hissed Trepoff, as he gazed back at the burly Colonel. We reached my rooms after the Donon dinner and were safe, seemingly, from immediate pursuit. In the gay dining café we were unmolested—unwatched. We had faced our foes.

"Let me write here to Vera Komaroff," said the resolute sailor, as he possessed himself of my desk. When I returned from a ten minutes' private conference with Dimitri Trepoff, whose eyes were moist, as he gave me all the outpourings of his heart, I saw Serge Zastrow, standing by my writing table, with an opened parchment in his hand. The air of triumph on his face was irresistible. His brightened manner was contagious.

"This will do the business!" he cried. "How did this get here?"—he joyously danced around as he flourished the paper!

"It's my sister Madeleine's expired passport!" I said, in wonder. "Every two years, an American passport has to be renewed! I went and obtained her a new one at the Embassy in Paris, when we thought of coming on, and so kept the old one!"

Serge Zastrow's eyes were blazing in excitement. "Has yours been returned to you?" he eagerly queried. I handed it out, without a word. He examined its back, and the cabalistic marks on it.

"Eureka!" he cried. "This can all be done here! And, this paper will be our common salvation!" He thrust it in his breast, and gayly said, "Now, for your plan of action for to-night!"



"I have my private orders from Dimitri, as to his messages; also, a letter," was my response. "Then, all you have to do, is to encourage your mysterious charge to hold out a week, in hiding,—and I will then offer her a safe home,—also a clear, open pathway, under invincible escort, to Warsaw,—and,—then, may God watch over you both, for a six hours' run!"

"That's royal!" I cried.

"Now, Dimitri, you need rest!" authoritatively remarked Zastrow. "Go home alone! I'll send Grahame in to take breakfast with you to-morrow! And, he will have his hands full with this night's expedition! Do you go, and get a good sleep! You need it!"

I was sorry for Major Trepoff, as he dragged me into my bedroom. "To see you go on my quest, Walter!" he groaned. "To know her in deadly danger, every moment! And, I,—to have my hands tied! Tell her,—tell her,——" and he broke down. His head was buried in his arms as he sat, bowed at my table.

"Now! look here! Dimitri!" I said, severely; "you will have our devoted support! Go and sleep! Think always that yours, as a part,—is the hardest to play! And, you may need every friend you have! Watch the Grand Duke! Show yourself in the highest loyal society! There, too, are our great friends, the princely Mouravieffs!—All these could help at a pinch,—help you,—but, Hermione's secret must be buried in our three hearts! And, remember Zastrow's sensible plan,—your will-o'-the-wisp chase, of the decoy inamorata! There is the Grand Theater, the Marie, the Theater Alexandra, the Michel, and that gay haunt, the Petit Theater—the Panaiev.—If you get a spirited, gay girl and one who likes her little 'outing,' you can mystify even the sneaking Luboff! Your chance chum will also have a friend or two! There are the wild ballet girls of the opera,—the fairy, dashing riders of the Cirque Ciniselli! Take two or three of them to Cubat's,—Leinner's,—and down to that rattling haunt, Mildrelt's.—A dash in a sleigh with the 'specially selected' one,—along the Quai du Chateau,—the Ekaterinenhof,—a few flowers and bonbons,—a basket of wine, in fact," I said, gayly. "A thousand rouble

note, well expended, may save your life! Live the life of the average guardsman up to date, for a week! But, hide the face of your inamorata, as much as you can! In fact, contrive a surreptitious visit or two to your rooms! Let them discover plumply covered skeletons in your closet!"

Poor Trepoff laughed bitterly, as he sallied forth. "I did not know you were such a devil of a fellow, Grahame!" he cried, with a poor attempt at pleasantry. "It's the first time a sedate Philadelphia lawyer ever set the pace for a Guardsman! You are a born devil—a regular ladies' pet!"

He grasped our hands, and the jingle of the bells soon told of his homeward voyage.

"You had better wait a little!" said Zastrow, daintily compounding himself a moderated vodka, offering me his cigar-case. He threw himself in a chair. "You see that Trepoff is gone,—clean gone! Nothing left in his upper story! All settled in his heart! We Russians make fools of ourselves over women! From the cradle to the grave! Headlong and gallant, poor Dimitri has already idealized this prisoned beauty! God knows who she is, or where she came from! It's all the same! Nothing stops our hot-headed fellows! Last year,—poor Scherovsky,—on his way to Japan,—with an outfit of ten thousand gold crowns,—met a dashing Bohemienne at Wilna! —He lost his head and then, turned night into day, there! Feasted and reveled with the reckless singers! Showered presents on her and her mad confreres, and ten days after he left home, when he was supposed to be already on his steamer, at Brindesi,—he gave a last royal supper to the witching Magyar gypsy. At three o'clock in the morning,—the frightened girl called in the *mâitre d' hotel*! There, among the emptied champagne bottles, and faded flowers,—lay poor Scherovsky,—his pistol still clenched in his hand,—a ball in his brain! He had bidden her sing 'Little Devil!' once more,—for him,—in a lover's good-bye,—their lips touched the last glass together,—he tossed away the cup, kissed her in a mad frenzy of passion, and then,—shot himself, in her very arms! No! No!—It is devilish,—this witch beauty dance of these

bright-eyed devils!—And,—in this case,—all that Trepoff lives for now,—is to save this woman; he has lost his head as well as heart, for he wants to,—nay, insists,—that he shall marry her!”

“Why, he is mad!” I exclaimed. “She is an utter stranger!”

“Ah!” gently said Zastrow, “Grahame! wait till the same frenzy touches your own weakened heart, and you will dance the tarantella like the rest of us! There’s one eternally true thing,” he said, slowly; “women rule our lives, every moment—for good or ill! It’s either a woman you have loved,—or one whom you wish to love,—or that you will love, who either doubles your joys,—or trebles your sorrows! Trepoff may have met one of those same madly, self-devoted superior women, who, in sheer vacancy of heart, throw themselves into these dangerous secret schemes! The lady conspirator,” he laughed, “usually soon finds, among friends or foes, in this strange whirligig of adventure,—it don’t matter on which side,—some one who ‘fills the void,’ and usually goes to the devil with her! Now, there was poor, simple Sophic Perovsky,—she met three or four such soul companions,—before the halter drew around her slender white neck! She ruined a loyal family,—led at least two men, for love of her bright eyes,—down to an early grave of shame,—and herself, paid the same awful penalty!” Kindly Zastrow crossed himself and murmured a prayer. “I have often danced with her,” he said, reminiscently, “when she was of the golden circle! This swan of Trepoff’s may be one of the same flight!”

“Good God! Zastrow!” I cried, “I can not bear to think of Trepoff’s ruin,—of his forfeit of rank, name,—perhaps life! She has sworn that she is clear of all dangerous or criminal intrigue! That she only came here to deliver some papers, which were on her person, when she became frightened at a supposedly hostile movement, in the halls of the Marble Palace! And,—the Durand woman took away her fearful trust, in safety—from Trepoff’s!” I paused, in a new quandary as to my own future safety. Was I now under the ban?

“Bah!” said Zastrow. “A loving, passionate woman

will tell her lover almost anything! God help these white-bosomed daughters of passion! They believe these very things themselves, for a time! I do not doubt that gratitude, the air of mystery, and a real sense of this generous devotion has set this veiled beauty's soul all aflame, for Dimitri. Now, if the fruition of these hopes, were only easy,—a hum-drum every-day affair,—in a month,—she would probably go one way,—and he another! In a year, they would have perhaps forgotten each other's names and faces! Nothing chills like possession!"

"Trepoff has met the passion of his life here!" I gravely said. "The dearly bought joys will linger, a sweetest harvest,—or else the dark flood of sorrows will sweep them both away, in a ruin of their young passion-thrilled lives!"

"Yes," sighed Zastrow; "you are right! It is too late to stop him! He is in the rapids,—and he must now guide his own canoe! He may shoot the waterfall! The chances are against him,—unless you and I can save him! I never saw a man so wrapped up in a blind adoration! He is blind to all things now,—but this witching Hermione! Who can she be?" he mused.

"She is simply a dream of beauty!" I slowly said, as the hour of ten warned me to be off.

"And, when do I meet you, Zastrow?" I said, with the air of an old conspirator.

"I shall have to go to General Zastrow's to-morrow! The Komaroffs may arrive at any time! I will know in three days, if Vera can get her father to obtain my leave! Of course, you must meet these people! Dear old Michael Zastrow! He has lived in retirement, since his son was killed on the Danube! Only the Komaroffs and the Mouravieffs, are intimate there now! I don't mind warning you about one thing, you and I will have to face these! It's my own doing, too!" he gloomily mourned. "The very biggest devil I have met in this desperately fast town is just now an inmate of Zastrow's house! Last year they came down to Cronstadt for the sea air! My ship was lying there, and I naturally dined every day at their villa! Now, little Olga,—the General's bright-eyed tyrant grandchild,—was ship-crazy! Of course, I adored

my cousin's orphaned child. I was not, however, called on to adore Félise Dauvray,—the woman who is now the 'ame damnée' of the Zastrow household! She came 'highly recommended!' Of course, she has her own way, with the doting grandparents. And, when I played a very poor imitation of Paul and Virginia,—with this fascinating French devil,—I did not know that she was only a clockwork, supple-jointed love machine! Now, I have hidden from this gallic 'ingenué'—my growing acquaintance with the Komaroffs! Vera Komaroff is delicate,—proud,—spirited,—and haughty! On her brief visits,—she has always frozen this French witch, with a cold patrician politeness! If that she devil,—a human eel in silks and velvet, would read my secret, there is no revenge which she would stop at! And,—I even fear for Vera, herself! In fact, as we are all brothers three, now, in Trepoff's interest,—I will say frankly to you, Grahame,—it is because Vera Komaroff has promised to be my wife, I hope to save Dimitri, by getting his charmer out of Russia! That sudden flame may cool,—one or the other may forget. But, I have to pay my past folly's tax,—by a defensive game of living chess, with the Dauvray! So, you see, the past darkly shadows my future!" he groaned, as he paced the room. "Dear old Komaroff is a simple, grand seigneur! He would ignore my very existence, and close his house to me for ever, if he knew I were once a slave to this 'rosière de voyage.' She is a devil,—a smooth one,—a sly one! She was only down for four months at Cronstadt! When her letters of a not innocent passion, were discovered among the correspondence of some of the poor fellows of the 'Conspiracy of the Forty,'—I was cruelly undeceived! I broke off at once all relations! The fragrance of the rose has fled, but, the thorns are still sharp! And, so,—I have frankly warned Vera that this woman hates me! She knows enough of the maneuvers of foreign governesses in high Russian families,—to ask me no more! In fact,—while Countess Komaroff is my sworn friend, I must get my next grade,—a fleet rank,—before I dare to take Vera away from her superb home! Then, I shall go to the best foreign station,—the Mediterranean;—and,—take my

Vera away,—out of Félise Dauvray's power! It is a sickening story! Most men have similar memories!" he dryly said.

"I should think that you would not let the innocent child remain in such hands!" was my indignant comment. The world has its dangers for lambs from infancy!

"Alas! That lot of people are all over very much the same. Olga is a mere child yet!—I will watch this fair Félise,—at any rate,—some one will soon run away with her,—she will fasten her claws into some rich youngster's heart, for the days flit by,—and the flower must be culled in season! Félise will make a little circle of her own, perhaps, in the *jeunesse dorée*!—I wonder," concluded Zastrow—"that the police did not question her down at Cronstadt! But, the purport of her letters, was so clearly the soft song of Love, that the query would have been vain! You may not know it, Grahame," he dreamily said, "but, the desperate love intrigues of Russian higher life,—beggar the painted passions of the *Decameron*!"

"I imagined the current of true love sweeps along a bit faster here,—than in staid Philadelphia,—especially from your own modest disclosures!" I remarked drily, as I sallied out into the night, and chewed the bitter end of reflection all along the Nevsky! I was among a nice, cool-headed lot of people! Love idiots!

When I halted, and began my maneuvers of the Hawkshaw character, I was too sadly conscious that I was neither a Vidocq, a Gryce, nor a Sherlock Holmes! I had not the subtlety of Jonathan Wild, the wit of Fouché, or the trained sagacity of a Pinkerton! I abandoned all effort to be supernaturally cunning,—and I mingled,—with a modest desire to mingle unobserved, in the casual crowd drifting down the Nevsky! I, however, retained enough timidity and presence of mind, to linger in several shops and make some trifling purchases in the great passage! By a happy inspiration,—I cast glances at the half-veiled glass doors of the booth where the words "*Articles de Paris*," seemed to be ominous of future troubles! "I wonder if Zastrow's keen-eyed tyrant, the Dauvray, was an '*Article de*

Paris?" I growled, as I sauntered into the shop. For, I had seen the trim form of Madame Marie Durand, moving among the fans, powder puffs and gallipots! She seemed to have a roving commission. I approached the dark-robed shop-girl, and mustering all my choicest "Philadelphia French," plunged into the mysteries of "cire de moustache"—Pinaud's "Brilliantine," and other articles suited to a dandy tourist! The twinkling eyes of Marie Durand rested on me with a single warning glance, as another would-be purchaser entered. "I will wait upon Monsieur!" she remarked, and I understood both the signals of her deft fingers, and her whispered word, "Wait!" When the stranger had finally departed, Madame Durand raised her head from the show case. "This way;—I will show you what you wish!" and my heart beat as I found myself again in the little back room, behind the thickly-curtained doors. I had not time to speak before the light was extinguished, and, a slight noise grated on my ears. "Now! quick!" was the friendly whisper of the alert Durand, as her plump figure guided me on! I stepped forth gingerly after her, and the sliding noise was repeated. "All right now!" she said in a low voice, and the gleam of a taper, lit up a dark angle of the heavy stone walls of the Bazaar. With a nervous grasp, she moved aside a couple of superimposed packing cases, and a hole in the floor yawned before me. "Go down!" she said. "I follow!" And, as I groped my way with bended head down an inclined passage, with its wide steps out in the earth, a sudden chill smote me. I heard the sound overhead of some one replacing the cases, and then, all was still. My heart beat wildly. I went cautiously on, stooping, and now following the silent woman, still candle in hand. The little passage was cased with fragments of heavy boxes tightly wedged together. Ten steps sufficed for the incline, and then ten more showed a heavily bulkheaded door. It was a secret haunt, under the building adjoining the Italiansky Bazaar. My companion paused a moment. There were confused sounds, and I was quickly dragged into a room whose narrowed dimensions admitted of no furnishings, save a platform table, a few boxes used as seats, and a

couple of rude couches. An opening in the farther corner indicated another hidden exit; a twisted oil wick in a cresset alone gave a feeble light. The air was close, and a woman was there cowering alone over a charcoal brazier in a corner. "I will leave you, now!" whispered Durand. "Be careful! Forget forever what you have seen to-night—even in your dreams; for your own life, as well as ours, depends upon it!" There was nothing to indicate human occupancy save the couches and the brazier. When the shop woman left us, she had wrapped herself in a working woman's shawl, and she silently vanished through the opening at the end of the room. And this had been the lover's trysting place, in the shadow of doom!

I cast my eyes in a vague wonder around, as the sitting woman sprang up, and I heard the sounds of fastenings being secured, behind the vanished one's path! Then, turning to me, the beautiful face of Hermione, the nameless fugitive, glowed in all of a loving woman's devotion; as, seizing my arms, with nervously clasped hands, she cried, "Tell me of him! Is he still safe?" I led her to a rude seat, and, in fearful whispers, I gave up my budget of mental dispatches. With her graceful form bowed, her noble face covered with her slender hands, the woman whom Fate had so strangely made the blessing or bane of Dimitri Trepoff's existence, listened in silence to my relation. I spared nothing, and told her of all our hopes, our plans, and even all our fears. I gazed around at the mean shelter, not worthy to be the abode of a dog, and then deeply pondered upon what madness had led the sobbing woman into such a haunt of misery. I fear I was slightly didactic, as I said, "It must be some mighty impulse, some high aim, which leads a woman of your grade into such a blindly desperate quest, and puts your life in such daily peril! Your associates, your situation of the moment, your desperate future perils lurking darkly before you, may even follow you out of Russia! The arm of vengeance is a long one!"

I was faced by a glowing vision of triumphant love; for that strange woman Hermione, her hands clasped on her throbbing bosom, cried, "I thank God for the danger-



haunted path which led me to Dimitri Trepoff's side! I would die for him, to save his name, his golden future; and may God grant that I may not die with him!" The glow of an unearthly beauty mantled her face, as I watched her, for the tide of burning love in her glowing words, the flash of her splendid eyes, told me that the high-souled Trepoff had at last met his mate in the mad self-devotion of this woman's love.

"But, you cannot long exist here!" I cried, in commiseration. She smiled faintly. "This is only a retreat! I sleep in the back room of the shop, or in one of the chambers of the houses, at the other end of the outlet, where we have some true and tried friends. Open seizure, or official question, is what I fear! It was a fatal error—my visit here! I might have known that this poor face would attract the eager glances of the blasé muscovite officers. My appearance and manners seem to indicate to them a personage of some rank," she sadly smiled, through her tears. "And it was my being skillfully accosted at the Marble Palace which caused me to flee away, and meet my fate in Dimitri Trepoff! That, and the glimpse I fear of the face of a man, whom I thought either dead or buried in the lonely Asian wastes far away! It is that man, alone, whom I would fear! No! this haunt is usually vacant. There are no articles left here to betray the friends of Liberty to their foes, and I am now freed of my secret burden. They should never have bidden me to come—some rougher nature, some ruder, braver soul!"

"And so you are a friend of those who take their lives in their hands?" I asked. "Only of those who strive for liberty. I had with me, on my person, the keys to the ciphers which, in hundreds of new letters, are used now by friends abroad to aid the escape of those in Siberia, or to bring tidings of the poor men and women still immured here! Only that, I swear to you on my honor! I am now free! I have once risked my life! My whole work is done! I shall ever be a friend in heart to those who struggle! Alas! It is a hopeless cause!" she sighed. "From this very room, men and women have gone forth to the scaffold, the rack, the gloomy hor-

rors of the prison cell, the awful dungeons of Siberia,—the exile of a life! Few run the gauntlet. I may!”

“And now, you have a double faith to keep—to shield Trepoff’s name and also to avoid bringing the police down on those who have sheltered you!” I gravely said. “It is indeed true,” she sighed. “I am entitled to such poor shelter as can be given me. I am not asked to longer share any secrets of the circles of Liberators here—my work has been well done. My trust is now only one of a loyal silence! And, all here would fain be rid of my useless presence. Alas! A noble friend of liberty, a powerful railway official, aided me over the frontier at Lemberg. His own voyage to Wilna on a special train, enabled me to easily reach there, in my proper guise. I was thought by all to be a lady of one of the legations. At Wilna, I left my wardrobe and belongings—those fitted to my real rank in life. I was there disguised by our local friends, and came on here with the passport and papers of a dead member of the order. I was obliged to wait here to deliver the dozen tissue sheets which now are being memorized by a hundred of the order here. Careful copies of those priceless papers are now on their way to Siberia, to the Caucasus, to far Tashkend, and duplicates are safely hidden here beyond all possibility of police danger. The one member of the Superior Circle here who was alone authorized to receive them, was to have met me that day in the Marble Palace; for an Imperial Special Courier, leaving that very afternoon, would then have taken one copy direct to the mouth of the Amur, under the very cover of the Czar’s royal Road Pass. It was one chance in a million! Had it not been for Trepoff’s prompt boldness, for the shelter of his rooms, for the safe meeting with Durand there, the whole plan would have failed, and the key sheets of the new correspondence system might all have fallen into the hands of the authorities. It would have been failure, doom, disgrace—a useless sacrifice! Now, at least, I die victorious!” She was glowing in a triumph which thrilled even me.

“Was it not a madness to try to meet there?” I hazarded. “Ah!” Hermione said, “there is not a single royal

palace—not one fort or ship which has not been chosen sometime as the safest place for such fearful trysts! On sheltering myself here with Durand, I was amazed,” she concluded, “to learn from the Executive Chief, who was responsible for my safety, that the friend who had passed me into Russia so easily had been suddenly promoted, and then ordered forthwith, to the Caucasus. He left, alas! no successor on the Lemberg road, and I am now trapped here! My whole personal baggage has been, however, conveyed from Wilna, and is here. But I am now wholly cut off! To get out seems impossible! Unless I have some help, my appearance will surely lead to my arrest! And,” she mournfully concluded, with the desperation of a hunted soul in her beautiful eyes, “I will—I must—leave here! By changing every twenty-four hours between the different knots of our friends, I may mingle safely with the ‘irregular’ people—those who have no legal papers here! There are hundreds—nay, even thousands of them! In the boats on the Neva, in the villages of the interior; even among the hundreds of basement rooms of the Imperial Palaces here! If my refined appearance, the air of society, did not make it absurd to play the humbler parts, I might be aided into the family of some foreign diplomat as an attendant, and so reach the frontier without suspicion! But,” she sadly smiled, “men have eyes as sharp on the Neva as on the Seine!”

“You must trust to us—to Trepoff’s cousin and to myself,” I urged. “For he dare not himself try to meet you now! We are trying to prepare a secure retreat for you; and I will at once communicate with you. Even Durand must not visit Trepoff’s own quarters again! They are constantly watched! Can you devise a feasible plan for me to meet your friend, this faithful woman, in safety? For now, I alone, am the open channel for your needed conferences with Trepoff!” My honest voice touched her; for she pressed my hands warmly in silence. “Let me think,” she murmured. I gazed at this exquisite shapely beauty bending there before me, her rich dark locks sweeping over an ivory neck—a sad romance of dabbling in state crimes!

A hideous vision! The grim figure of the executioner blinded me. I started up in horror. "For God's sake, hasten!" I cried, "I am stifling here! I cannot sleep unless I know you are out of this horror-haunted den!" I was rapidly gaining Trepoff's exaltation.

Hermione raised her noble eyes, in a flash of trustful tenderness to mine. "Be at dusk to-morrow at the Kazan Cathedral—before the great silver shrine. Marie Durand will be there. You can then stray safely away into any dark corner; and, kneeling there, confer with her, as you will. It will save you the risk of being seen at the shop too much."

"I will be there, if alive!" I cried. "But, surely it was useless for you to bring all your own personal belongings into Russia, to live in such grovelling retreats as this!"

"Alas!" she sighed, "all nice plans fail, when tested by untoward accidents! Our good genius of the railway was to have left me at Lominetz, in the province of Minsk, on my return voyage towards Lemberg. One of the great ladies of that province, a secret friend of ours, had offered to harbor me in her own princely chateau, far from trouble. Her husband knows not of her reactionary sympathies. There, I could easily mingle unchallenged as a foreign guest, with her circle. On her annual fitting to the Riviera, I could have then gone out with her; for, our friend was to have been telegraphed, and passed me out with her party! Thus, I would be spared the danger of the long homeward trip alone, and he, for we too must shield him, who has risked his life a hundred times for us,—he would not have been forced to be tête-à-tête with me. Spies denouncing him, would have surely doomed us both; for, up to the very last moment, I could be stopped, even within the sight of Lemberg! Now, our last outlet is closed! I cannot get to the shelter of her chateau! There I could pass the winter, even if she had to make the plan to rescue me, after going over the frontier herself. She knows me as Hermione De Vries, a Belgian widow, of rank and wealth. I dare not now write to her, or telegraph. All the letters and dispatches here are examined; and no one can be

sent on from here whom she would trust! My railway guardian dared not even to try to communicate with me! I am lost, unless you can help me! But," she sobbed, "I will die alone, faithful to the past, true to Dimitri Trepoff!" With flashing eyes, she handed me a slender golden band drawn from her finger. "Tell him this! Give him this little ring! Say to him, 'Loyale toujours! Amour éternel! Fidele à la mort! Foi garde, honneur défend, à la fin!' Go now!" she sobbed.

"I will never desert you!" I cried, in a transport of emotion. "My good friend!" she faltered, "you are also too true to your relative Trepoff! Let me not feel that I am leading you into, perhaps, a serious or even a vexatious imprisonment! I know your bright land of freedom! I spent some happy months there once! I pray to the good God that you will reach it safely once more! Now, I will guide you out! And to your dying day keep a strict silence on what you have seen here! You hold a hundred lives in your keeping now! But I will not insult your loyalty! Only in the future, remember others in my place here!"

"Trust to Zastrow and to me! We are concerting a shelter for you, near here, and, if our friends only come to our aid, I may, perhaps, take you over that dreaded frontier myself! I will have tidings for you to-morrow! Can you leave here at once?" She gazed at me with her beautiful wistful eyes shining in hope.

"Whenever you have the shelter ready, if you dare to harbor me!" she murmured. "For, I would fain save thee, even at the risk of my life!" She led the way along a long narrow tunnel for forty paces and then paused at a bulkheaded door. Her fingers trembled with the heavy fastenings. She murmured, "Go on, now, boldly! I have signalled! Do not speak, and gain the street as soon as you can! There are some steps! Count twelve paces!" A last sigh, "Adieu! May God save us all!" sounded as I heard the door close behind me. Fear lent my steps speed. Steadying myself against the walls of the tunnel, I counted twelve, and then reached a flight of steps cut in the firm earth. With a nervous hand, I tapped softly at a closed door. It opened, and a voice

huskily said, "Hasten out! There is the door!" and the guardian stood hidden behind the door he had quickly opened, as I passed into a long hall. By a distant glimmering light, I could see an archway to the street. I was standing alone in the cold night air before my eyes recovered from the one flash of a dark lantern, which had shown me the one door of exit. Stumbling along, excited and wearied, I saw before me the familiar bridge of the Anitchikoff. I turned into a vodki cellar, which was still open, and drank down two glasses of the fiery white liquid. With chattering teeth, I hailed the first droschky passing by, and then sped away to my rooms. As I drove up to the doorway, two lurking figures slunk away from the entrance! The lights were still burning in my rooms, where Zastrow awaited me. I was under surveillance.

"Am I, too, under watch?" I groaned in dismay. I decided to change my location at once; for a horrible fear had taken possession of me. My fate was now linked with Trepoff's own, and with the matchless beauty who had called herself Hermione de Vries! I had in a half an hour finished my relation to Zastrow; I had answered all his thousand queries as to the loveliness which baffled my powers of eulogy, and then I finally told him of my determination to soon change my own quarters, for the spies were surely on my track!

"Good!" he cried. "I am going to domesticate you, my boy, at General Zastrow's!"

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## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE RAPIDS!—A WOMAN SCORNE.

I slept little after my descent into the hidden cave, under the Italiansky; for, all I could extract from Serge Zastrow as to his plans was an injunction to wait in peace and trust all to him. "Yes, sir; I will install you there among these old respectables as a visitor, if I can get my long leave. Remain here on watch for three or four

days more! If Vera Komaroff's charm works, then—I will soon have you under the safe cover of that dear old family fortress. I can come to you day or night there! Trepoff can always breakfast or dine with us as a family affair. The old General, 'an old Russian' of the very strictest school, speaks no English, and his sunset days are passed under the guidance of my dear old aunt. We will be taken upon trust, and absolutely our own masters. We will have a citadel there, proof against all outside spies, and I will give you the surprise of your life!"

He was deaf to my entreaties for explanations, and he only cried, "Wait, wait! I must confer with Trepoff, and then, set myself right at the Ministry of Marine. Yes; it is the one haven for us all! We can do as we please there!"

"And the sly French devil—your quondam summer queen of last year!" I anxiously said. "What may she not do in revenge?"

"Ah!" he grimly replied, "the Countess Komaroff and sweet Vera will paralyze her by their presence; for I shall have them as guardian angels, until you, Counselor Walter Grahame, are safely over the frontier! I shall also escort you down to Warsaw myself!" I was silenced, and yet the very star of the drama was forgotten.

"And Hermione, the shadowy queen of Trepoff's wild dreams?" "You will see! You will see!" he said, smiling. "Simply wait and watch. I have a plan which will astonish even you!" And so he went away laughing.

I dreamed all that night of the fierce Luboff dragging me forth before a file of troops and growling in my ear, "I have General Haxo's order for your instant execution!" for I had been seemingly apprehended, in the dim recesses of the cave below the bazaar, and strange, hostile faces leered at me in triumph, as pale Hermione was borne away a weeping captive, her agonized face still haunting me in its unearthly beauty. When I awoke with a start, the windows were crusted with blinding snow, and my servant was rattling the samovar utensils. "It is very late, Barin," he said, apologetically; "and there are also many letters for you." It was a half hour before I could shake off the cheating reality of my frightful

dreams and emerge into the dreamy cheat of the social day in Petersburg. My resolute friend Captain Serge Zastrow, looking very trim and warlike in his Captain's uniform, dashed in upon my breakfast. The dark and gloomy day decided me to remain indoors and close up my preliminary correspondence. "With or without the company of fair Hermione, I must, for family and business reasons, soon leave Russia!" I realized, from the letter of my lonely sister Madeleine in Paris. I hastily penned an answer to her urgent appeal for my company. She had tenderly, but a little pettishly, written, "If you are longer delayed, I will come on at once to St. Petersburg, and then we can go down direct together to Mon Plaisir; for I know that Justine will welcome us both, even in winter snows." "This must not occur; I will stop it, at all hazards!" was my brotherly decision.

"I think that I have enough on my mind, just at present!" was my verdict, as I closed a most emphatic missive, directing my sweet sister to remain under the wing of our American family friends, established in Paris.

"On no account, Madeleine, must you think of coming here now! It is really very unhealthy, and I find it a task for even my own robust constitution to resist the rigors of the winter!"

"That will keep her from indulging any rebellious ideas of coming here! It would complicate things gravely. I then would not be free to help poor Trepoff!" I thought, with a sigh, as I posted those letters myself. I was glad to see a man open the box and remove the letters as I strolled back to my rooms. "Nothing will happen to those letters! They are in safe hands!" I chuckled, for I had heard many wonderful tales of the insecurity of the muscovite mails. I was destined to sadly verify them.

"Now, I am going to astonish you, my dear Graham!" cheerfully remarked Captain Zastrow. "I am going down to the Ministry of Marine. I have already a telegram from Vera Komaroff! She is a dear little trump! If I have my month's leave promptly accorded, I am free to make my grand coup. I wish you to keep away, though, from Trepoff! Don't even bow to him in



the street if you meet him in strange company. Ignore the gay wrongdoer! And, keep away from the Bazaar! Your duty is simple, masterly inactivity, just now! Of course, you can go and see the Durand woman to-night, as you have planned. But, let her always communicate with us in her own way. She is a hawk-eyed witch! Don't you see, as speaking not a single word of Russian, you are practically helpless! All I wish to use of you at present is your very respectable appearance. And you must stay here at home to-day, at least till I return! By the way," he laughingly said, "if I were you, I would burn up all my private letters save your clear business papers; or if you wish to keep any family letters and such sacred things, deposit them sealed in your bank, or take them to your Embassy. But local papers—your gay record—I would destroy. Remember the Dauvray. You know the strangest things happen!"

"I will be back at noon!" he cried, gayly, as he departed; "and if I have my leave granted, I will tell you all my plans. I must save your character as a traveler intact, and also keep you in an honest ignorance. Dimitri and I are agreed that we must take all the risks, and even we will have to avoid each other in public. He is going to 'ruffle it now bravely' and lead that scoundrel Luboff a merry dance! A gay little intermezzo!"

"What can be this quick-witted sailor's scheme?" I muttered, as I vainly tried a dozen occupations while awaiting his return. "Never mind!" was my final comforting thought, "sailors and cats have charmed lives! This bright-hearted fellow knows every shade of the sly intrigues of the Neva, and, with Dimitri, a past master of all the lore of the Court, the clubs, and society, they will find out a hidden loophole for our safe retreat! At any rate, every day now cools the first suspicions." I was but half-done arranging my correspondence when Zastrow dashed up in his sleigh. "Victory!" he shouted. "I have my leave! So I am free to act!" He was in the very gayest of spirits. "I will just run down to Cronstadt, this afternoon, and settle my private matters for a month's stay! I shall go to the Zastrows to stay with you, as a guest, for the Komaroffs will arrive to-

morrow evening. Vera is a good fairy in this juncture. Now, my dear Counselor," he firmly said, "close up all your own affairs for a short absence! To-morrow at two I'll send you down to Wilna, with one of my pet middies, to show you the sights of our 'little Paris,' as we call it. It will give us time to work—and shield you! It's a jolly place, and if you can commit a few manly indiscretions there, why so much the better." He fixed his sparkling eyes on me in merry fun. "What do you mean—riotous living, spendthrift folly, a small whirlwind of debauchery?" "Precisely!" he replied. "Just that! It will really do you good; and you will see some very devil-may-care little circles down there. In fact, I only want you out of the way for a few days! Your nerve will be steadied. Then we can use you later."

I began to understand. "And, while I am gone, you will secrete Hermione?" "Exactly so!" he nodded. "And neither you nor Trepoff is to have any hand in it!" he cried in triumph. "I shall appear for a time to be the lady's sighing swain!"

"But you don't even know her yet!" I amazedly remarked. This was really Russian.

"Oh! I will easily fix all that! Durand and Trepoff will give me a very good character, I am sure; and I have a little token, you see—a password—already!" He held up Hermione's ring. I sighed, and rather envied him his perilous embassy. So vain and jealous is the manly heart! Even lawyers can play the fool now and then.

"Well, I suppose I must drift with the tide. I'll be all ready to cast off my moorings! That's nautical, isn't it?" I queried.

"All right—classic, my boy! You're a very trump of Quakers!" he heartily said. "Now, you will not see me again until to-morrow at one o'clock. I'll look out for your rooms here in your absence. Don't forget to look over your letters!" He was away like a flash. "I certainly must leave no trail!" I mused, for I am not a Russian with an adjustable heart and a convenient social code." I feared that demure Philadelphia girl.

I was busily engaged in finishing my sealing and

bundling up of my family correspondence, in the afternoon, when my servant, by our agreed-on dumb show, announced that my modified Russian bath awaited me. Ascending two floors, I was soon under his vigorous manipulations for an hour or more. A dreamy little nap of half an hour followed. The Nirvana, of Muscovy; alas, too brief! I had conveyed the intelligence finally to him by the exhibition of my watch dial and much useless gesticulation that I would be awakened at three o'clock. When I was finally aroused, the thought of my appointment with the indispensable French woman brought me full jump into the field of action. "And I've just time left now to drive down the Nevsky and leave these parcels of letters at the bank! It closes at four. And I must seal them with care!" I stepped into my working room, and the sight of the whole floor littered with a cloud of my outspread papers vastly astonished me. The hurried work of a few moments caused me to sink back trembling in my chair. There was not a vestige of my sacred family letters to be found anywhere! The legal documents and my other private articles had been strewn rudely about. The papers of my absent Philadelphia clients and the Department correspondence were lying there thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. Everything I would have charged the bank with, all my heart secrets, had disappeared! Even the letters of my shy Quaker fiancée.

"Some one evidently who understands English!" I groaned, as I threw the hated law documents together in a heap. "Shall I accuse my man?" I mused. It was most astounding! Ringing the bell, he appeared. His evident honesty and his quaking fear was only too apparent when he comprehended my loss. Slipping out, he returned at once with the house dvornik, who spoke both French and Italian. The stolid air and obstinate silence of the burly porter told me that he was lying. He knew the cowardly secret. I was left alone, and not comforted by some scientific swearing of a sulphurous nature. I was ashamed to confess my loss. "I will not ever let Trepoff and Zastow know what a blamed fool I have been! Now, who could have taken just those

very private letters!" A cursory examination of the other rooms told me that a skillful rummaging had also taken place there while I was up stairs. I was not comforted, either, when my frightened servant crept in, and then, locking both the doors, with fearful motions, imitated the sly unlocking of my doors, and significantly saying "Vassili Ostrov," made signs in that direction, and vaguely pointed to the fortress. The rough dumb show brought new terrors to my heart!

"Ah!" I groaned, "it is then a secret police house visit! Who could have posted them!" I remembered that Trepoff had laughingly pointed out to me the headquarters of the Third section, at the head of that dreaded street. "Who was the traitor?"

"It's the dvornik!" I cried, in despair. "He must have seen my servant conduct me up stairs! And he either summoned these spies, or gave them the tip! Thank God! My private letters are absolutely uncompromising,—they are only journals of the heart,—and absolutely useless to them!" In which sage conclusion I rested, happy now in my approaching run to Wilna. "I am glad to leave!" I roared. "I will clear out of here—out of Russia, too!" was my indignant resolve. And I, then and there, registered a solemn vow to cleave unto Philadelphia, like the bark on a tree, in the dim future, if I ever reached my dear and natal shores! "I fear I was not cut out for monarchical institutions!" I objurgated; and in a last wild defiance to the Czar, his police, the secret agents, and all the cowardly lurkers on my path, I grimly resolved henceforth to lock nothing in Russia. "Should they want my linen, a few much-needed toilet articles, or a selection of my humble wardrobe, they can just pitch in and help themselves, without breaking my fastenings or destroying the house furniture! I will instantly burn up all the family letters I receive after this!" And I then wondered, in my rage, if the postal authorities opened and read my outward letters—"A nice lot!"

"Much good may it do them!" I stormed, strong in my innocence. And it was some time before I discovered that this "new rule" to me did "work both

ways." If it did them any good, it certainly did not strew my path with roses! I was not in a very devout mood as I knelt in the evening shadows before the magnificent silver balustrade of the Kazan Cathedral. I had lingered under its exterior colonnade to reconnoitre for the faithful French woman, but though its hundred columns sheltered crowds of strangers, lovers, beggars, tourists, and tired-out wayfarers, I did not yet see the woman whom I waited for. Gazing in awe at the wondrous richness of the great high altar, I awaited some signal of her presence. "Perhaps I may even be dragged away from here, out of the house of God, by the Vassili Ostrov spies!" I furtively mused. When a light hand touched my arm I saw the figure of a heavily veiled woman, robed in deepest black, kneeling at my side! My eyes followed her as she rose and walked heavily away. It was indeed the Durand! Rising at length, and slowly threading the great crowd, kneeling there around the venerated image of Our Lady, the adoration of the mystified Cossacks three hundred years ago, I found at last a remote corner, far away under the moldering trophy flags, where I could safely approach the friendly messenger. I was soon on my knees at her side, as she prayed in dumb show. "For God's sake! be wary!" she softly said. "A special activity is just now observed in the whole police! Our friends are openly dogged everywhere on the streets! Loris Melikoff and Ignatief were severe enough, but, Tolstoi is even worse! Do not venture to come near us!" The woman trembled like a leaf as she continued the dumb show of her prayers. She had pointed toward the Italiansky Bazaar.

"And, Hermione, that poor woman!" I gasped, as I awkwardly bowed and made some visible signs of devotion. I was cornered up like a rat! The skies seemed to grow darker every day.

"The naval officer has seen her and conferred two hours to-day! She must make an effort at once to change her hiding place! A descent of the police on the tunnel and her capture would only give a hundred new victims! This week we will vanish; the little booth will be occupied by others, and the bazaar entrance to the

tunnel tightly closed! We shall not risk the underground retreat! I shall shelter myself with a dress-maker here who always works for the court ladies. There I am free—and safe, too! The little business will be moved over to the Gastiny Dvor. We have faithful friends there. Such things provoke no comment—the shopkeepers are always on the move. But, we can no longer shelter our poor friend there in the cave! The other entrance is heavily mined. If the police try to force the bulkheaded door,—should they discover the farther entrance—” She hesitated.

“What then?” I whispered. She drew a long breath and trembled, as she replied, “Some of the police and all in the cave would meet a horrible death! There is a self-acting charge of dynamite there! If they try to batter down the bulkhead, they will surely explode it! All of our watchers at the other end are gone; the goods are being even now, removed, and a new face is there. The only remaining entrance opens behind an old café!”

I was horror-struck! “And I must leave her prisoned there—leave her to her fate?” I groaned in agony. My reputation for fervent devotion was established, for several worshipers noticed my fervor. But, alas, I was only praying for that beautiful hunted woman!

“Do not give way!” the brave woman murmured. “Zastrow has her retreat already prepared, and if there is no descent by to-morrow evening, she will be safe! He will take her away to-morrow! So, you can go away, in present peace and future hope.”

“And if it should happen? You say the town swarms with active spies!” “Then, forget us all,” she sadly whispered, in a thrilling undertone. “Those not killed in the explosion will need no vain human aid! The dark fortress over there will be our prison,—our judgment place, our tomb! And it will be a hasty shrift!”

“My God! it will kill Trepoff if any harm should come to her! He loves her! He loves her! He is rapidly growing mad for that love!” I sadly muttered.

“Ah!” the French woman sighed. “*Tout passe; tout lasse; tout casse!*” This is only a world of blood and tears, here under these cold arctic skies! And it is the

common lot! Time chills the loving pulses beating once as one! Whitest arms unwind from round one sighing lover, to clasp another yet, in even a wilder frenzy! Death with unerring grasp tears the crown from kingly heads, and the rags from the starving beggar's back! Old age steals away our graces, our strength, our very heart throbs, and then leaves us alone, sceptered only with the useless sorrows of the past! I have long since grown desperate! I have loved,—and lost! I care not when the summons comes—only, let the hangman do his work well! For here below, only misery and tyranny is strong! The gray crown of unhappiness is the gift of the coming years!" She rocked herself to and fro. "The snowy locks of a bitter old age!"

"But, you have a husband?" I hazarded. "Ah! We of the doomed have no such real ties! He is only a husband in name,—a waiting brother, like myself, under the ban! We juggle with those paltry relations for a grim purpose,—you of the world,—only for pride and vanity! No! I am alone,—alone with my life-long sorrow! We merely divide the name Durand, as one dual human social animal! I am alone; and do not forget loneliness is man's state of nature! For, we are born and we die alone! There's not a love we meet which does not loosen its clasping arms and leave us sadder for its vanished joys!"

"And, love!" I whispered, for I thought of Trepoff's mad devotion. "What is love?" "Love is the iris on the waterfall's rainbow! As you approach it, it vanishes! As you grasp it, it lies dead in your clutch, like the painted butterfly! It has color and motion, and yet neither life nor purpose! Love is only an echoless song, which spends itself in vanishing sweetness and dies away forever!" She was weeping, this strange desperate woman! Some olden memory had smitten the rock of her iron heart.

"Then, nothing avails in this world," I said, fascinated by her gloomy pessimism. "Wealth, pleasure, power! These things are simply the trappings and baggage of fools, doomed in each quickened breath of gratified vanity, to an earlier death!" "I believe in nothing,—in noth-

ing!" she said, "but freedom! The wild liberty of the viewless winds! The self-guided freedom of the tornado! The human mind, a quickened spirit, whirling along, albeit in darkness, is chainless forever! No sage, no dreamer,—not even Alexander on his golden throne here,—can answer to me whence we come, or whither we darkly wander. We poor mortals are but the comets of the dense blackness, the night of ignorance; and our bed of darkness, our natal beginnings, our final end, sums up the value of the whole equation of life. Nothing! And yet, in this darkness, the voice of Freedom sings in the dawning light!"

"Then, you are a—" I whispered; but she cut me off with a sigh and a sob. "Just a heart-broken woman!" she faltered, as she bent her head. "Go!" she murmured. "All is well! Obey the brave Captain Zastrow! I shall see you again! And, I will watch over Hermione with my life! Poor blossom in the storm! For she lives—to love!" "Where shall I see you?" I eagerly whispered. "Trust for that to sorrow, to my fidelity, and to fate!"

"We shall meet again! And Zastrow, before that, will tell you all! Watch yourself in every move!" And then and there, on the cold stones of the gloomy Cathedral, I sighed. "Tell her that I, too, will stand by her cause, to the last!"—and, rising, I left the desperate woman conspirator alone there on her knees before the shrine of God! I slowly regained my home, and the silent rooms seemed to be now haunted with an atmosphere of dread and gloomy distrust. My servant, too, eyed me with a growing fear, and a new nervous desperation seized upon me. My loneliness galled me. "Let these things all lie as they are!" I recklessly signalled, though in a mechanical affection for my law-papers, I rearranged my scattered archives. "I will go out and make a night of it,—alone!" I determined; for the figure of the despairing woman conspirator in the church still haunted me. "I will find a gayer side of life!" I swore, if only for a brief hour.

"I will follow her advice! I will simply look out for myself!" and then, I dressed myself for a café dinner,



where, at least, I would hear around me the clatter of merry voices, the popping of corks, and the shrill laughter of wine-loving women!

I sighed as I thought of this strange nature of Marie Durand, offering to me her acute and well-judged counsels, and then, calmly risking her own individual neck under the hangman's noose for the general amelioration of mankind! "A strange medley of the ideal and the practical!" I was forced to admit. And then I wondered, too, what had been the past,—the forgotten past,—of this woman without a future. And, fearful of all women reformers, and strong intellects, I questioned the unanswering fates as to whether a lost love,—a soul betrayed, a womanly fountain of passions choked up forever,—had not driven her out, a mere wreck upon life's ocean! A bark driving rudderless on in the black storm, with all sails set! Driving on to ruin,—to the rocks of woe!

But, I resolutely experimented at Dominique's gay resort, in face of the Cathedral, where I had learned the sad wisdom of Marie Durand, to see if wine,—fiery, sparkling wine,—would bring my flagging spirits up to the level of the proposed gaiety at Wilna. A crowd of merry young officers, some tourists of the higher class, a few diplomats, and many country nobles, filled the splendid rooms. On the stairs, the passing rustle of silk told of the pretty wanderers seeking "*les cabinets particuliers*," under the very gayest escort! And before I paid my reckoning, and prepared to swagger out boldly, in a Bombastes courage, I saw in one quick glimpse my hunted friend Dimitri Trepoff, with his most grand seigneur air, hand out a remarkably gracefully formed young woman from a sleigh and guide her over the snowy sidewalk in his own peculiarly chevaleresque manner. The fleecy Russian cloud, fine as the muslins of India, only showed to me a pair of sparkling dark eyes; but, the springy, dainty stride told the story of the ballet! His whole actions betrayed the devilishly reckless indiscretions suggested by Zastrow. "Ah!" I groaned, "Dimitri is really superb in his 'great *divertisse-*

ment' act!" He was surely playing his role fully up to all the requirements of the situation.

Before I sought my own couch, I double-locked all the doors, and also placed some heavy furniture against the entrance. "They may take a fancy to carry me off in the night!" I wrathfully reflected. I sighed for Trepoff's offered revolver. And from a sea of uneasy dreams, I was at last awakened in the morning by the pounding of my man, who ushered in Major Trepoff long before the alleged daylight was faintly illumining the frozen streets. I gazed at him blankly as I sipped my morning coffee. My mind was still in a confused whirl; and my "legal head" was aching, too. His appearance was reckless, and even desperate. The internal excitement of his hidden passion, the marks of his social vigil, the meaning quiver of his agitated voice, spoke to me of a strain which would not be borne for long.

"I saw you last night," he said, as he gazed on my preparations for the voyage. "I only ran in to tell you, Walter! Do not dare to write or telegraph a single word to any one while away! Your smart young escort will let us know daily of your well-being. Now, to-day is the turning point in our future plans! If Zastrow can only guide her away safely to the refuge he designs, then, on your return we will at once make every preparation for the Warsaw journey, and for your own final dash over the border! I dare not linger too long here with you! I may be watched at present!" He rose, and paced the room in a fretful excitement. "Remember, you have absolutely nothing to do! The youngster who takes you to Wilna will show you all the lines, and I beg you to refrain from all personal conversation, no matter how tempting! Play your part, and so wait for us to effect your pleasant and safe arrangements for the outward voyage. This trip is only—a throw off! And, to give us a little elbow room here!" His face was very grave, even if his voice was cheery.

"Have you seen her, Dimitri, since?" I said, as I noted his anxiety. "No!" he faltered; "but to-night I shall surely meet her, unless Zastrow fails me! She must, however, be apparently under his devoted care, until she

is safely lodged in her new character!" It was easy to see the strong man was all unhinged in his self-control. "A mad tyrant,—Love ruled his burning heart!"

"And, how will I know if she is safe?" I insisted. "My heart and soul will be with you! I fear we have all been dogged,—followed,—and they may pounce upon the whole circle! Will I have news? We may even be called up and questioned—if anything happens!" I was decidedly apprehensive.

"You and I, perhaps, may be," Trepoff gloomily answered; but, Zastrow is so far safe! He is clear till now! Serge is just entering upon his own time of trial! But I feel that he will surely succeed,—that he will not be dogged and spied! He is a lucky devil, and cool, too! His high character; his chivalric devotion to Vera Komaroff,—these things are all greatly in his favor! For it is tacitly admitted that none may come between him and the graceful little patrician whom the happiest fates destine for his bride! In fact, every one seems to tacitly know it, save her gallant old father, who looks so far over his pretty daughter's head!"

When Dimitri Trepoff grasped my hand in adieu, his breast heaved in a mute agony, as I sent words of cheer to the beautiful fugitive, still prisoned in that mined cave! "I will not be alive a single hour, if the plans fail and she is discovered!" was the distracted lover's last farewell.

It was a well-judged mercy in Serge Zastrow that he simply drove up with fifteen minutes to waste in greetings. "Leave all as it is! Your man here is honest! I will be responsible! Now come! Young Saratoff waits at the station! His family are all down now at Wilna! You'll have a jolly time!" I loved the bold sailor for his affection of jollity, as he waved his hat when the train drew out, and my thoughts were left far behind, near the caged falcon in the underground den. I had become tired and heart-wearied with my cares, and all the heart-burning anxieties which I left behind! Every verst of the six hundred through the gloomy forests and straggling snow filled lakes to Wilna, I pondered silently over the desperate risks taken by the friends I left behind. "Ah! They would like to spare me!" I thought, as I closed my

eyes. "It is to save me that I have been hospitably exiled for these days!" and, in a fever, I slept. In a newer fever, I awoke, as the train rolled into Wilna, and my gay young companion Saratoff vainly cheered me as we stepped out into the cool, fresh morning breeze! I had hardly noticed the laughing boy officer, but I felt he was a man in heart, as he whispered—"I drive first to the telegraph office!" It was the only intimation which I had received of his sharing my dark anxieties. The splendid sleigh of the Saratoff family awaited us at the station, with the majordomo of the household, proud of his dashing young master. I affected a calmness which I did not feel when the young officer sprang out at the main Bureau de Telegraph. "I'm hanged if I can make this thing out," he lightly said, as he gave me a little, slender tape of paper. I read off the words spelled out there in broken French, by the recording instrument: "The Belgian cruiser Hermione arrived safely in port." I was forced to lie directly, for I saw the boy was hoodwinked. But, my heart silently leaped up, in one wild throb of thankfulness to God! "The first step!" I murmured, and then, handing the message back, remarked, "It is some mix-up! I do not know what it means!" In ten minutes, I was gayly mingling in the joyous excitement of young Saratoff's welcome home. It seemed this day to be the entrance to Paradise. The unstinted hospitality of his laughing young sisters,—the genial family circle,—and all the round of home joys,—the friendly faces, taught me in three days,—that the very warmest blood in the world circulates around the Russian home fireside. And,—in the hundred thousand dwellers of Wilna, divided between proud conquered Poles, and busy, bustling Israelites,—with all the hordes of Russian troops, and great swarms of uniformed officials, I was dazzled with the kaleidoscopic life. Palaces, colleges, museums,—proud old strongholds, and splendid temples of every sect, gave a polyglot romance to the old city of the Jagellons. Here,—mosque,—Greek cathedral, synagogue, Catholic and Protestant churches, all open to worshipers, side by side, showed the diverse texture of the great Russian Empire, now flooding the plains of

Asia,—and destined yet,—to victoriously overflow into Europe! Five railroads centering here, poured in daily their crowds of voyagers of all races. In threading galleries of pictured treasures, gazing at the glories of the old princely Polish homes, and, following in thought the great Napoleon's flight, a beaten conqueror, a fugitive invader,—I lived again in the storied past. For there was the old archiepiscopal palace—whence the man of Austerlitz,—in the meanest disguise,—fled on December 6th, 1812,—and left twenty thousand of his matchless veterans to die helpless in the frozen streets! In the wild hurly-burly of amusement,—in all the changing scenes of theater,—café,—gypsy singers,—and bazaars, I had but one thought,—“Hundreds come and go here daily in safety,—I am but a single grain of sand in this human waste. I can surely slip forth unnoticed,—for there can be no system to check all these diverse peoples, mingled in a wild whirl!” My heart was vastly lighter, as the brief dream of peaceful security ended. For, in the changing scenes of a glimpse of the charming interior life of a model Russian family,—in all the old romance of the Lithuanian realm, where the cross of Christ was set up on a hill, then still lit with the sacred fires of the Pagan;—in scenes where the Poles reigned in splendor before the Russian power was agglomerated;—where Christianity was victorious, where Kiev and Moscow were yet wild, heathen towns,—I forgot my silent adherence to the veiled struggle “for her life!” I had not dared even to think of the desperate steps by which Trepoff and Zastrow had brought the beautiful cruiser “Hermione” safely into port! And, I must return—and fulfill my vows!

Wandering through the splendid gardens of the Vilüa,—by its storied, lover-haunted bowers,—gazing on the proud tombs of the chivalric Polish nobility,—lingering near olden shrines of blessed sanctity,—and waking the echoes of pictured halls, I forgot that I was still in the web of Russian intrigue,—until the middy pointed out the very window whence grim Mouravieff watched the Polish patriots die by scores on the scaffold! I woke to a new sense of present cares, and future dangers, as Saratoff meaningly said, at dinner: “We must take the night

train! I am recalled to my ship! I had a telegram from Captain Zastrow this afternoon!"

In the intervals of the brief merry-making, I had decided to keep my own counsel. "The truth shall not even be wrenched from me! It shall not slip from my unguarded tongue!" and I was watchful and amused myself only with the young sailor's chatter of himself, his chums, his ship,—and all that golden future which spreads out before us mortals—at twenty!

It was ten o'clock the next morning, when we stepped out of our returning train on the platform at the Moscow station. As the great gilded dome of St. Isaac's Church hovered over me again, I grimly reflected that four great bridges and three ferries conveniently led to the Citadelle of St. Pierre et St. Paul! The wide Neva was covered with flitting police boats, and swift steam launches! And, strange tales had often reached me, of wayfarers dragged from sleigh or droschky,—torn from their carriages,—seized quickly on the dark streets,—or at the dim dead of night, hurried, bundled up,—from their rooms to the river bank, where these grim barks of Charon bore them off on the darkening waters, to a never-lifted mystery of the unknown. The uplifted sword hanging over all!

There was no one at the station to receive us. My eyes met Saratoff's in wonder. He did not seem surprised. He murmured, "The carriage waits for us!" I was so cut by my friends' apparent neglect that I asked no further questions,—but gloomily followed Midshipman Saratoff. I felt my own utter helplessness, in the babel of strange tongues—Russian,—Jewish patois,—Finnish,—Polish,—and from frantic knots of weird-looking strangers, Persian, Armenian, Greek,—and all the strange dialects of Asia, arise in an unequaled medley. And yet,—no police,—no watchers,—nothing official was visible, in the way of restraint. The brooding fear of the men of the Vassili-Ostrov,—the Third Section spectres, who came and went at will,—still oppressed me, for all this quiet entourage. I resented the fact that Saratoff evidently knew of plans, in which I was reduced to be a mere pawn! But,—pride tied my tongue, and, I

mutely followed him out on the grand esplanade. I was so secretly outraged at heart that I did not even lift my eyes, when our closed double carriage rolled away in a direction strange to me, which only excited my renewed suspicions. For,—the route lay up the Neva.

I struggled with my pride for a half hour,—until I recognized the Okhta Ferry, and the Place Adlerberg! I had joined once in a very merry supper party at a dingy little hotel there, presided over by an ex-chéf of the French Ambassadorial cuisine. And, I was still mute and obstinate, as Saratoff said earnestly, “I leave you here. For, there is a naval launch waiting for me at the ferry!” The porters were already busied with my sacs de voyage.

“And, am I to be dropped here like a sack of sawdust?” I indignantly remarked. I was wrathful with my treatment.

“You’ll find warm friends waiting for you! It’s a strange country!” smiled the gay middy. “I have to obey orders, but you must come down and see me, on the ironclad at Cronstadt! I will give you at least a few happy hours,—and,—you can take your revenge when you get hold of me some day at Philadelphia!” The laughing boy pressed my hands, and,—calling a droschky,—rattled away to the ferry, as I followed a head waiter, waiting, napkin on arm,—who met me in the dark doorway.

“The déjeuner is waiting, sir!” he said, with great deference. “This way, sir!”—and,—in a moment,—I was clasped in the arms of the overjoyed Zastrow, who laughed at my wondering gaze around. His welcome disarmed me!

“It was for our safety! Sit down, and let us chat while you are eating! I know you are famished! We are perfectly safe here!”

I drew a long breath of relief! “Safe! But,—for how long! Not a mouthful!” I cried, “until you have told me all! How is——”

“Hold!” he earnestly said; “no names! All our friends are safe and well! You will see them all very soon! Tonight,—in fact!”

“And why, then, have you brought me here?” I was

still a little nettled at the cavalier way in which I had been flanked around. I—a grave and reverend lawyer!

Serge Zastrow forced a huge draught of Burgundy on me.

"You are a true American! You will ask questions!" He drew up a chair near, and then whispered:

"We dared not openly communicate! We sent a man down to Wilna to tell Saratoff where to bring you to-day. He knows absolutely nothing! He must not! There are three of us, now, in this dangerous affair! And,—that is heads enough to risk,—even for two loving hearts!"

"Why! I thought that all was going on well!" I faltered.

Zastrow's face grew very sober. "On the evening of your departure,—I safely hid away the woman whom we must now guard to the very last! I do not think that we were observed, for it was long after midnight,—when I met her on the Anitchkof Bridge, whither she had repaired, with a heavy decoy bundle in her arms! To prevent any possible spying,—the faithful Frenchwoman went directly to a dressmaker's bench, and was busied, needle in hand, all afternoon in her new shop, where the court custom is itself a protection! I also publicly stationed Trepoff in a wild supper party at Donon's,—after the opera,—and, he has notoriously devoted himself to the strangely attractive little soubrette he picked up! Even Colonel Luboff has tried to find out who she is! So,—you see, Trepoff has made her the vogue!"

He laughed uneasily.

"Who is she?" I demanded.

"Oh! A stray little French actress who ran away from the Moscow company,—and came here,—with a diplomat! And,—she knows nothing,—save that her own bright eyes are very fetching! I have one safe place in town to meet Dimitri! My uniform is its own passport always in the ante-rooms of the Grand Duke Michael! So, the path is open there!" He paused and forced me to begin my breakfast.

"Then, why these precautions?" I innocently asked.

He sighed. "Because, I wished you to meet the Coun-



tess Komaroff,—and, Vera, at dinner to-night,—for the first time,—at the Zastrows,—where, naturally, Dimitri,—as a relative,—would be under the sacred seal of a family home! And,—further,—the very gravest danger is over,—because I have removed all your luggage to your rooms at General Zastrow's house,—from which place, alone,—you must leave publicly,—with the Komaroffs to go to Warsaw!"

"And why?" I queried, with a vague, growing alarm.

"Because," he replied, "the shop in the Italiansky was all vacated the next morning after you left! It was easy to move the light goods, only across the street to the Gastiny Dvor! An application had been on file there for two weeks! The opening to the tunnel was closed and disguised. The shop-girl is already out of Russia, for, she had regular papers. So, that shop's history is over. I do not know if the giving up of the booth attracted attention, or if you had been followed from there,—from your rooms! Treachery is not possible among our own little circle,—but, last night, a very neat descent of the police was suddenly made! They tried the wrong end of the tunnel! They promptly battered in the bulk-head,—and a terrible explosion, and the death of several agents de suréte followed! The whole course of the tunnel has now been traced by uprooting all the galleries in rear of the little shops of the Italiansky."

"And, how do you know this?" I asked, in some amazement.

"There were those left on watch in the bazaar, who are leagued with these people of ours. They have their own secret friends everywhere,—even in the polygon!" Zastrow said. "The whole community, too, is honeycombed with the spy and counter-spy system! I had sent the man to Wilna to meet you here, for your rooms have also been secretly searched, again! I tied fine silk threads over all your doors, and systematically arranged the furniture myself! I found the articles shifted, and the tell-tale threads all broken!"

Zastrow waited the changing of the courses to resume.

"I sent all your own personal baggage, then, at once, down to the Swedish landing! Your man, for precau-

tion, is safe on my ship now,—and there he will stay till you are out of Russia. So, he must be muzzled. On that ship, I am a king!" Zastrow proudly cried. "All your effects and my own, then, went together to my old kinsman's, and, you will find your new home there a most pleasant one, till I send you away under a very charming escort!"

He eyed me curiously. "The past is in this way clearly cut off! I will have you under my own eyes! And,—I would be very happy but for one thing!"

The sailor swallowed a cup of black coffee and lit a cigar.

"It is the legacy of the crowning folly of my life! The bitter dregs of the honey of last year!"

"And, what is this annoyance, now?" I had a dim presentiment of the cause of the handsome young sailor's woes.

"Of course, the very key of our whole present plans is my presence, as a fixture, at General Zastrow's! I never knew that a woman could cleave to a man as the sprightly *Félice Dauvray* does to me now!" he grimly said. "I tried a little scene! It was of no avail! I then appealed to her sense of duty,—to her regard for the presence of the young Countess Komaroff! All in vain. She raged like a devil!" Zastrow was puzzled! "I can not avoid her at table! She threatens me with every dire disaster! Of course,—the etiquette is ceremonial. Old General Zastrow is very stern and taciturn! His son's death in battle took all the brightness out of his life forever! My dear old aunt speaks only Russian! She has almost forgotten the few French exercises of her youthful days at the Institute. It would be a very gloomy house in all its splendor,—if it were not for the bright little grandchild! And, I have always her between myself, and any undue tête-à-têtes with *Félice*! She is my present salvation!"

"You might buy the silence of this woman," I hazarded.

"You do not know the *Dauvray*!" Zastrow answered, slowly. "Wait till you see her! I must manage to placate her in some effective way! I dare not offer her an open bribe! She is a singular nature,—for she swore—by all the gods and goddesses—in our last interview,—

that she would not let me go! I have invented a thousand lame excuses to break our confidential relation. Alas! Each one lamer than the other. And,—the repression of the presence of the Komaroff ladies only makes Félice fiercer in her strange fancy for me! It's like being caged up with an affectionate young tigress!"

I was not joyful. "Beware then of her! This woman will surely try to ruin you! Unless she merely uses you,—as a stepping stone to reach the better circles here, then—your time will surely come! No man can withstand the jealous frenzy of a scorned woman! The unexpected will strike you in the tenderest quarter! If you are absolute in your idea of ending the romance, then,—beware! For, of course, you can not dally with her!"

"You are right!" he sighed. "And yet, I have no choice. She would not dare to lift her eyes to Vera Komaroff in any open insolence, but, I fear all covert things,—poison, some hellish deed, some mean revenge! A blow to me,—I must take in silence! I deserve it!—but—Vera—by God!—I will have this woman's life—if she attacks her!"

"Can you not have her sent away?" I eagerly asked, seeing his trouble.

"Alas! I can not meanly take advantage of my own wrong! To do her justice,—her conduct is openly irreproachable,—and, she never lifts her eyes. It would be lache for me to speak! Her only diversions are evening walks, now and then, on the English quai. But, I do not burden my mind with her now. The secret of her Cronstadt love-letters, too, was only whispered to me, by one of the court martials. This affair of the tunnel has convulsed the local society which,—in bated whispers,—speaks now of the shadow side of our life here! If either you,—Dimitri, or I,—were to be traced into its still hidden history,—a summary death would sweep us all into the common hangman's potter's field! Our present quiet is, perhaps, only the calm before the storm! The trial of our nerves is to come! For, only the great rank and social powers of the Komaroffs will effect the safe departure of you,—and, that wonderful woman!—and—she is a wonder—and—a beauty!" he sighed.

"I do not see, though, why your rooms have been so

lately searched!" the Captain mused. "You were away—true! You are sure there is nothing dangerous in your current letters? No free American comments? No Nihilist gossip? No slighting mention of high names?"

"Not a syllable,—I only wrote to my sister Madeleine at Paris."

The Captain started. "Did you happen to tell her not to write to you any more here?" he eagerly questioned. "Yes! I described all my proposed movements, and told her to remain in Paris until I telegraphed to her from the German frontier,—and then, to await me in Paris, or meet me at Vienna, if she could find traveling friends."

"Ah! I see!" he gravely said. "Perhaps it was only some idle curiosity of the police as to your long stay; but, if your private correspondence were in their hands, they might try to trap you in the future! You took care of all your letters?"

I bowed, and gulped the white lie, in a sudden fear! I had taken care of them; it was a plump, straight whopper! They had very neatly taken care of them!

"I am so thankful! Then we are safe! For, even if they would open one or two of your letters, now, they could only build up theories; with the others,—there might be danger!"

He stopped and took out his watch. "I shall now leave you here till five o'clock! You will find all of the latest Paris journals here to amuse you. Don't, however, go out of the hotel! The waiter here is trusty! I will come back and take you to your new quarters! The Zastrows always dine at seven,—and, for a week, your part will be only a passive one! Now,—ring for anything you want! Give the man all your orders! I am the host here! I must go away, and warn Dimitri at once of your safe arrival; he has been anxious,—and,—you will meet him to-night! For,—I shall sleep at his house,—and, he can use my room at the Zastrows! So, you can have a quiet conference! You'll find him pretty well used up!"

"And,—Hermione!" I whispered.

"You will also meet her soon!" he gravely murmured. "Grahame!" the sailor solemnly said, watching the effect of every word, "three lives depend now on your ab-

solute obedience to my orders! Trepoff is tied up hand and foot! He must not be further suspected! I have already risked my life,—and also Vera Komaroff's future happiness, at the call of blood and old friendship! Your sister Justine must never know of this,—not even a single word! Swear it, to me! These things kill, here—even after long years!"

"I swear it, Serge!" I said, trembling at heart to think of my fatal letters in the hands of the sly police.

"And,—you must quietly take up the passive position which I assign to you,—for your life,—and mine, depend now on shielding Trepoff, and the hunted woman whose loveliness and noble soul really merit our devotion, to the uttermost! Dimitri has told me enough to make her sacred in my eyes! We have all gone too far—now,—to turn back!" The sailor fixed his manly glances full on my anxious face. He was stirred to his bosom's core.

"It is true," I murmured. "And yet, Zastrow," I said, "it seems so very easy to leave Russia!" I told him of the untrammelled movements of the busy throngs at Wilna!

"No one even asked me for a passport while at the Saratoffs!" I added.

"Ah, my friend! Never forget that you were under a roof where a responsible householder was bound to produce a proper passport on call for you,—and to register you duly at the police headquarters, within twenty-four hours; also, to answer all, if asked, as to your movements,—and, besides, the travelers whom you saw,—they were all moving on interior lines,—and, all had *podrovjnas*, or 'road permits.' When you pass by Wilna, or the nearest large Russian town on any line, approaching to the frontier,—you then are the target of a hundred spies! Up to the very last half-hour, you can be stopped by telegraph,—and,—then—nothing but straight papers, and a correct demeanor will carry you out unchallenged! When you go to General Zastrow's as his guest, he is, then, responsible for you,—after he has admitted you to his table, as a family guest! Do not forget that he risks his own future tranquillity on your behavior!" Zastrow was very earnest.

"I feel that I have no right to intrude on this quiet household!" I said, with some little Philadelphia dignity. I was not willing to be a Jonah!

Zastrow's brow grew very stern. "Do not forget that I have already taken the responsibility of this—to save Trepoff's imperiled life and future,—to rescue this woman who now reigns in his loving soul,—for he is surely love-mad,—and that you must meet the position assigned you,—without flinching. For your own sake, too! It is the only way out!" he said, in a tone which absolutely frightened me. "Now I must go! I will be here at five o'clock! We must work as one! It is the only resource left. I ask you to school yourself to meet any new surprises! Any strange positions which we may be led into! As neither General Zastrow nor his aged wife speak one word of English,—you can guard a polite silence at will! You will find that Madame Komaroff and Vera will not question you, in any awkward manner! I have given my dearest Vera a bit of a half-confidence! And,—you will also daily observe that people in St. Petersburg do not need to be cautioned as to habitual prudence! The empty gaps in our high society left after the cruel terrorism of two years ago, have been bitter warnings to all the rashly inclined. So, you can let Trepoff and I lead you out! I would simply contain myself in the character of visitor for the week before you go to Warsaw. Amuse yourself with daily trifles. And,—remember,—as you are a man,—once over the frontier,—a single future word might doom poor Trepoff, or even myself, to the grave! You must swear silence and secrecy! Think always of your trust. It is the price of your own safety now! Think of your own married sister's position here! You must be dumb for ever as to this adventure!"

He then left me,—and, a sense of some overhanging disaster pressed heavily upon my wearied mind! Tired and unduly excited,—I threw myself down on a couch,—and slept until the cheery voice of Zastrow aroused me. It was already dark.

"All is ready! Come, now,—my friend," he said. "Remember all my directions, now! Your promise! You are absolutely unknown to the General and his wife! They never have even met your sister Justine! The Komaroffs

are fortunately strangers also to her! And,—hence, you have only to drop into your new character,—as a formal guest! Trepoff and I will handle all the rest!”

We entered the sleigh and dashed away on the snow-path always kept in the middle of the Petersburg streets in winter for “speeding.” I was quite breathless when we drew up at the entrance of a fine old mansion on the Admiralty Quai. As the *dvornik* threw wide the doors, I shuddered on entering the house which rose up dark and prison-like on the great silent avenue. But, all was light, warmth and cheerful luxury within. Serge gayly cried out:

“I will conduct you to your rooms. I have one of my own men from the ship already here to wait on you! He speaks French very well. Send me word when you are dressed, and I’ll come in,—and bring in Dimitri to you,—when you are ready to go down. Then, we will make the grand *entrée*! The bell rings always half an hour before dinner, and we usually then assemble in the drawing-rooms! I will then present you to the friendly Komar-offs! You will only meet the old General and his wife when the butler announces dinner! They are very quiet people! You will find your things, I hope, all in order!” Zastrow smiled peculiarly. “Now, remember! Don’t be surprised at anything!” he said, as he turned and walked away down the great hall, for we had ascended a noble staircase, to my rooms.

“Stay!” I whispered. “Hermione—where is she?”

“Oh! That surprise, too, will come later! Trepoff will have to tell you about that himself. You may, perhaps, meet her to-night! Now! again, remember! we have buried all the past!”

I carefully arrayed myself for a formal dinner, while admiring the quaint splendors of the grand old apartment now allotted to me. Over the mantle in the principal room hung the portrait of a splendid-looking officer. Evidently the dead hero!

“The rooms of the young master, whom we lost on the Danube,” said the quick-witted sailor valet. I found my fingers trembling, and my heart beating, as I tied my cravat, just as the silver bell rang its warning. The prom-

ised surprise! What could surprise me now? I was becoming Russianized!

"Pray tell Captain Zastrow I should be happy to see him," I said, as I remembered Serge's last injunction. I was standing there lost in admiration of a fine old Persian tapestry, as a gentle tap at the door aroused me. I carelessly cried, "Come in!"—as my thoughts had wandered away to the placid Schuylkill. I had just addressed myself eloquently as follows: "If I ever get safely out of this very peculiar land,—I think that I will take my sister and cross the Atlantic to beat the record! I am tired of mystery!—and of cold shivers, too! If Justine wishes to enjoy our Yankeeified company,—she and her good husband can come over to us!" I slowly turned my head, as I heard the unfamiliar rustling of silk in my own den! But, I sprang up in a sudden alarm as a stately officer, towering in full dress uniform,—led up to me a vision of the most entrancing beauty! I gazed, in palsied astonishment,—for, Serge Zastrow in all the bravery of his gala costume,—had closed the door—and,—quietly locked it!

Dimitri Trepoff—Major of the Paul Regiment—faced me there with the lovely stranger, the woman whose silken lashes had drooped over her streaming eyes when I saw her last, in the damp underground cave of death—the secret band's last haunt, the home of a nameless new cult! Oh! God! How lovely she was! And,—yet, robed in all the splendor of her station,—her eyes met mine in one last pleading glance for pity—for forgiveness! I began to have a dim suspicion of a snare!

"What does this visit mean?" I gasped. "Are you mad or only silly?"

"When you take Countess Komaroff into dinner to-night do not forget," said Serge Zastrow,—taking her trembling hand and placing it in mine,—that this lady is your sister, Madeleine Grahame!"

Ah! God! This was the surprise!

"You are mad to rush into this desperate ruse!" I cried. "It is our very ruin!"

"Grahame!" said Zastrow, in a low, stern voice, "your real sister's old passport gives this lady now a name! I



have had all the visas forged upon it! The Komaroffs can pass her out of Russia! On your single nerve, now, depends our three lives,—and your escaping a trip to Siberia!”

“My God!” I groaned.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE WAY OUT! — FOUL PLAY.

There was a gloomy silence in the room, where four schemers now shared a secret which might be the death-warrant of the party! I saw now the bold manoeuvres by which Serge Zastrow had placed me in an irrevocably false position. It was not to be remedied. In sharing the common dangers, I saw at last the fatal consequences to me of concealing the loss of my letters; and, now I was unable to protest. I dared not! There was my oar—and the galley must be driven ahead!

“This masquerade can not be maintained,” I said, as Hermione de Vries glided to my side. My anger made me quiver in range. I was stupefied with the audacity of Zastrow’s bold stroke. To tie me down, like a dog!

“Why not, Walter?” warmly whispered Trepoff. “It seemed to us to be our only course. It can not be undone! Not a soul in this house knows either you,—or your real sister! You are otherwise powerless, helpless, passive. This gives you an easy role. None of the five adults here will care to converse with you. For, you go away—so soon! And, your new sister Madeleine can play her own innocent part with the Komaroffs. She is mistress of all the languages. Your very avocation of lawyer will excuse you in habitually keeping to your rooms. Letters and current business are a fair excuse! Now, Serge and I will execute all your outside commissions! Your department business, you have told us, is in order!

“You can drive around openly to all these places in the Zastrow equipages! My own man will conduct you! Only, you must guard a golden silence! You can be

taken along under the invulnerable escort of the Komar-off ladies, as far as Warsaw! Then,—it is only a trial of nerve for a few hours! Now, what better could we have done?”

I was silenced, and yet—not convinced. For, I was haunted by my secret of the stolen letters.

“If I should be asked, or examined about my absent sister?” I murmured.

“Bah!” resolutely said Zastrow. “One of us will be with you all the while! No one will care to question you! Don’t you see that General Zastrow alone is really responsible for this lady’s character. That is our risk—not yours. The old passport is in his hands! The dvornik made the usual report required by law,—two days ago! Our three lives hang now on your prudent submission. It is useless to rebel. Too late!”

He was inflexible in his will. I bowed my head in a sullen silence. But,—a strange foreboding chilled my heart. Those letters; and,—I dared not tell them of my loss! So, we had already deceived each other!

“I see it!” a sweet, low voice said,—thrilling on the still ominous silence. It was the beautiful unknown who spoke,—standing there before me, robed in all her resplendent beauty! “You would not have your absent sister’s name so profaned! A doomed woman, perhaps even now. I swear to you, though, that through me,—the honored name shall not come to shame! Death may as well claim me now! I only consented to act as your sister in a dumb-show. I was asked to do no more. Captain Zastrow then brought me to this house. I thought at first, only as a hiding place! I have risked my own life,—with his,—to save—Dimitri Trepoff!” she faltered,—as she tottered,—and then, her lover’s arms received her.

It was a dismal tableau! The clang of a silver gong called us all to the salon. I dared not speak! For the agony of the generous woman had riven my heart. She murmured: “Let me go to my room! I will face the future alone! I can steal away to Marie Durand! Some friendly cellar may give me a shelter! And,—there is

yet hope! I will have no deceit,—no heart-break, no quarrels here!”

“Never!” I cried. “Let us now go down! It is now,—all for one—and, one for all! But, you should have warned us both fully of this, Zastrow!” I said, reproachfully. “Then, neither of you would have been manageable; you would not have risked the other! We must only act now! We have talked enough. Remember—Grahame! silence! You will take in Madame la Comtesse Komaroff! Let Hermione and us handle all the table talking! Watch but one person,—Félice Dauvray! If you wish to be safe,—then, only chatter with little Olga! She speaks a childish English! Leave all the rest of the play to us!”

I was still bewildered as we descended the stairs, but the hall rang to Zastrow’s merry sallies and Trepoff’s ringing replies. I was spared any effort at dissembling,—for both cavaliers gallantly attended Miss Madeleine Grahame! A flood of light,—the reflections of strange faces in the dazzling mirrors,—the gleam of crystal chandeliers—and the sheen of ormolu—the magnificence of the vast portrait-hung drawing-rooms;—all were accessories to the group in which my plain habit de soir paled before all the magnificence of the grenadier and the sailor! A double hand grasp from the old silver-haired General Michael Zastrow, as Serge presented me; a warm greeting from the aged hostess; a motherly old Russian,—enabled me to turn my embarrassed eyes upon the graceful Countess Komaroff,—gentle, faded and refined,—I received a hearty greeting,—in liquid French,—from Vera Komaroff, whose eighteen years and morning graces of life made her seem one of the Greuze or Watteau’s love nymphs!

“You must be so happy to meet your sister once more,” she neatly said, as she fell easily into a sotto voce conversation with the beautiful Madeleine. I promptly possessed myself of the pretty chatterbox Olga Zastrow,—who had already yielded up her infantine heart to the fair unknown. My voyage,—the embarrassment of a polyglot circle,—the announcement of the dinner, all busied me, until I offered my arm, with my very neatest

legal bow, to Madame Komaroff! I felt in my heart the wisdom of Zastrow's policy, as I seated myself at the splendid table. Serge was the escort of my new-found sister, and I dared not yet gaze upon them, but fixed my eyes upon the splendid picture made by Trepoff,—who seemed not to have a single care in the world,—as he murmured sweet nothings to the adorable little Countess Vera! She was evidently a spoiled little patrician! I recalled myself,—at Zastrow's gravely polite presentation, for “Mademoiselle Dauvray” flashed a pair of keen, inquiring eyes upon me, as she led her charge to the table. I observed the distinct recognition of the grade of lady,—in the formal politeness, though distinct in its ceremonial coolness,—which was extended to the governess!

I addressed myself to the silent duties of the well ordered repast, while around me, the tide of conversation gayly flowed. I was mentally sizing up the situation. I could not avoid noticing the empressement of Serge Zastrow, whose devotion to my fair sister was as marked as the guarded politeness of his deference to the little Countess. He would hide his love, and I knew why. “Even the keenest plotter may overshoot the mark!” I thought, for the ruse was too clear to thoroughly screen Trepoff,—to accentuate his *entente cordiale* with my supposed sister. Zastrow was even too lover-like in his *bonhomie*! A strange, uneasy feeling crept over me then, as I observed the liquid gray eyes of the Greek-browed Frenchwoman, regarding my handsome neighbors, with a flash of keen, surprised scrutiny. A superb beauty from the south of France,—Félice Dauvray, in her modest repression, was possessed of undeniable personal charms! Her molded figure was grace itself, and the gliding vivacity of her graceful movements suggested at once the charmer—and the serpent! Ruling the dainty child with the simplest glance or gesture,—I could yet tell, in the faint quiver of her shoulders,—in the over-carelessness of her self-effacement,—that every tingling nerve was strained in attention! For, the gentle blandishments of Serge Zastrow were evidently a torture to the woman in whose nature a purely possessive passionate love had effaced all other thoughts. Light-hearted and

careless,—Dimitri Trepoff was just as debonnair as if the myrtles of Sorrento hung over him,—in place of the dark shadows of the wintry Neva, fortress guarded,—and flowing in its icy darkness to a wintry sea! Evidently—both cavaliers had studied well their over-acted rôles!

I was very uneasy at heart,—as I thought of the scorned woman,—baffled now in her struggle for the empire of Zastrow's heart! Seated there, replying in low, musical tones to the solicitous tenderness of old General Zastrow,—and the bereaved grandmother of the sprightly child. I noted the cat-like attention of Félise Dauvray's furtive manner.

"The old, old folly!" I mused. "Here are Zastrow and Trepoff playing their dual parts,—of interchanging their queens of Love and Beauty,—both forgetting that other games can be easily played. They seem to forget this fiery-hearted governess! What is her own little game? I will watch it! I shuddered, however, as I thought of the possible consequences of her rage against a woman, whom the blinded Zastrow was now showering with the gallantries of a truly Russian ardor! So blind is Love! So foolish is Passion!

"If she should watch us,—and detect them! If she should discover that this sweet beauty is not my sister!" I dared not follow out the idea! In the suddenly-formed desire to flee away incontinently from the domain of the double-headed black eagle, I prayed that the storm might break alone on rash Zastrow's head. "I hope it will be only one of a woman's jealousy,—not revenge!" was my secret wish. "For, Serge Zastrow can weather a good round storm of womanly rage! I can not defend the sister whom I have so strangely found."

While I demurely paid my own court to Madame Komaroff, I weighed the possibility of a feigned assault by me upon the heart of the discarded love of last year! Alas! Beside the perfections of the young officers,—my sedate brow and sober speech had no charms! I recognized,—at once, the guarded position of three visiting ladies! Evidently the sweep of Mademoiselle Dauvray's influence began and ended, in the grandparents, and the

charming little orphaned rosebud Olga! But, how would she strike at Serge? When,—and where?

And yet, as I gained self-confidence, my eye met the merry glances of Serge Zastrow, over my champagne-glass, as we drank "To the Emperor!"

He signally failed to understand my telegraphing winks to moderate his unnecessary devotion to Hermione. Zastrow led the feast with all the aplomb of a favorite son of the house. Alas! He only partially replaced the gallant one lying far away on the Danube!

I was careful to always address a few brotherly observations, in English, to the object of Zastrow's adoration, and thus escape the watchful scrutiny of Made-moiselle Dauvray. "I must not seem to be an absolute stranger to my ward and sister!" I thanked Heaven that I was separated from the gallant old General seated at the head of his board, bravely decked with his glittering orders and Crimean medals! The reticence of the sad-eyed mistress of the house saved me all needless social lying; and whenever I was directly addressed, then Zastrow and Trepoff, cunning of fence, flashed in, and, turning the tide, prompted, guided, or saved me. But, Félice Dauvray studied every move I made. My spirits had at last returned, when we had finished the dinner. As we returned to the drawing-room, I was in a more cheerful state of self-possession. When I stepped up and kissed the hand of the hostess, I cast my eyes upon Serge Zastrow and my sister of this one anxious week, standing and whispering earnestly, in a corner of the great hall. It was a picture for the eyes of the gods! The frank, gallant sailor, the witching beauty, were both of nature's fairest handiwork! I fairly started, as, by hazard, in a mirror, I saw the reflection of Félice Dauvray's face regarding them, with a look of devilish hatred. Already! My blood flowed away from my heart. There was a look of doom in the woman's pitiless gray eyes, and I murmured, "Which one!"—for there was the hovering curse of a scorned woman's sleepless vengeance in those unrelenting eyes! I turned and gazed upon the lovely mysterious foreigner standing there with Olga at her side. Through the governess' guarded manner and

the necessary self-effacement of the dependent glowed the self-assertion of a discarded woman,—once beloved,—fighting hard to secretly draw her lover once more back to her side! “If the old General and his wife were not now lost to all the passing shades of human passion, by their overhanging grief, they might see this too-evident passion play, and then send her forth!” But it was vain to hope!

“Alas! to what avail!” I groaned, as I followed Zastrow and Trepoff out to the coffee-room, where the half-hour dallying over our cigars enabled us to arrange for the ensuing movements of the opening play,—a play with human lives as the stake!

“I will come up to your rooms at once, after we spend a half hour trifling with the ladies. Serge can then do the honors,” whispered Trepoff. I was delighted. “I will warn Dimitri of this bold French woman’s self-betrayal,” I thought. “Yet, again, to what purpose! A lonely woman, a child’s governess,—she certainly cannot harm us here; for, thank God, etiquette’s slender line still holds her aloof!” And I felt, too, a strange pity for the woman whose lover knelt now, before her, at another shrine! I did not know that the same headlong emprise marked all Russian “flirtations.” I was a novice.

“A week will soon glide away!” I reflected. “Then, ho for freedom!” And I mentally resolved not to return in the spring to St. Petersburg, but to go from Vienna, by Lemberg, to Kiev, and so keep Marguerite, the real Marguerite, from the danger of ever discovering her beautiful double!

“Is she not beautiful,—a queen?” proudly questioned Trepoff, as my new sister passed the draped doors of the Turkish smoking room, arm in arm with the bright-eyed Komaroff heiress. “How did she obtain these feminine splendors?” I queried in amazement at the grand toilette and jewels, which heightened Hermione’s rare beauty. “The Durand conveyed all here safely!” murmured Trepoff. “In the event of detention, or being forced to pass the winter with her secret friend in the Minsk province, these womanly adornments were all needed for her to play the part of guest in a great Rus-

sian chateau! For, life, if lonely in our country homes, is still princely. Evidently, this aristocrat conspirator down there is enabled to safely invite house parties, among whom are always smuggled in some of these strange enthusiasts." It is our game of Hoodman Blind.

"Has she told you all her story, Dimitri?—her family antecedents?" I was leaning closely to him in eager excitement; for I wished to know where he was drifting.

"Ah! no!" he gloomily replied. "Grahame, she is a true heroine! 'Only in happier days,—when free,—when I can prove my loving words, and wander over the scenes of my girlhood life with you; or else, if I should perish, then you would know all,—to justify my memory!' So she answered me! She is goddess,—woman,—and also, the inheritress of a strange family burden!" As Trepoff spoke, a rich resonant woman voice rose in a passionate love song from the alcoved rear drawing-room. Serge Zastrow stirred most uneasily and glanced in a strange agitation at the door. "Who is that singing?" I cried; for all the pent-up longing of a love flooded heart vibrated in the pleading strains. He, the Cronstadt Paul, knew too well the voice of his desperate Virginia.

"It's the Dauvray!" Zastrow bitterly said. "She can almost move heaven and earth with her singing!" And he leaned against the open door, listening with clouded brow, to the veiled appeal of the woman who still loved him, and whom he now loved no more! Man's heartless empire of passion!

The sound of the clanging of the great outer portals caused us all to start up, for Dimitri Trepoff quickly sprang to his feet. "Zastrow! Zastrow!" he hastily said, "no strangers! Remember our—"

But, Captain Zastrow sprang back, and quickly closed the door. "By God! it's Luboff!—and in full uniform, too!" We were stunned.

Three astounded men mutely gazed, in a wild shock of sudden alarm, at each other. As Trepoff faltered, with returning wits, "Is he alone?" Serge bowed his head, and a grim silence reigned. Here was danger.

"Zastrow!" I muttered, springing to his side, "you



must use all your wits now! Get him at once out of here, in some quiet way. You must! You have one enemy in the house!—that French woman! I watched her burning, angry eyes! She hates you, for your foolish court so openly lavished on our charge; and you must stop that!”

“Ah! I don’t fear that poor devil of a woman!” he anxiously said. “I had forgotten that Luboff once was General Komaroff’s adjutant down at Warsaw! He served till the dear old chief tired of his merciless brutality, and had him shipped up here to Haxo, as second in command of the Military Police here. He probably called to pay his respects to Madame Komaroff and her daughter. Yes, it was an error!” Zastrow cried. “I should have guarded against it! And yet, how could I?” he groaned. “General Zastrow knows him, and we dare not refuse a polite visit! If I could only get her—our poor fugitive—out of that parlor!”

“How did he know that the Komaroffs were here?” I questioned, with trembling lips. Dimitri Trepoff was standing as if transfixed. His hand was in his breast; the singing was suddenly stopped; I could see that Major Trepoff stood quivering and ready to dash into the hall! It was an anxious moment of agonized doubts.

“For God’s sake, Dimitri!” hissed Zastrow; “remember where you are,—control yourself! What would you do?” For a wild look was playing on Trepoff’s face as he slowly said, “Him first!—to save Hermione! Then I would kill myself,—to save my honor! The hangman shall never lay his hand on a Trepoff!”

“Madman! That would ruin all! Is he the only policeman in Russia? Here—this way, both of you! He must not see us!” And, Zastrow, who had played as a boy in the old house, led us around into a rear room; then, double-locking the door into the smoking divan, he stood on the alert with his hand on the only door opening into the great hall. “Safe, now!” he cried.

Suddenly, he grasped my hand like a vise. He whispered, “Luboff does not know you! Cross the hall softly; and, from the dining-room, you can see and hear the conversation in the front salon! From its side door,

you can see him take his leave! If it's only the old General he meets, then we are perhaps safe! If he is presented to Hermione, then to-morrow is not soon enough for you to make your dash for Warsaw! I could give you private letters to Komaroff!" He was in a sea of doubts and fears. And my beating heart was racked in new fears.

"Why do you fear him so?" I whispered. "Ah! Grahame! he can not be fooled with our little artifice, which so easily controls this simple household! He is also a notorious woman lover! Hermione's dazzling beauty will tempt him. He will try to hunt her down, as he has too many before! Go! go! and for God's sake, be careful!"

I, Walter Grahame, advocate and counselor, stole in there like a thief in the night; and it was easy, through the folding-door, for me, standing hidden in the shade, to see Colonel Ivan Luboff most fondly bidding adieu to a group of ladies. As he turned to the door, I was thunderstruck to see my alleged sister, there at the side of Comtesse and Mademoiselle Komaroff, and old General Zastrow, with his stately wife, sheltering pretty Olga between them, as the visitor turned away to the great hall. I feared to cross it, until I should hear the front doors close, and I finally saw the three ladies returning to the interrupted music. I was ready to watch his departure now.

Fearful of being observed in my undignified employment, and sick at heart, I darted across the hall. A single nervous glance down the great corridor was a precaution of safety. Luboff had not departed! And he lingered—why?

There, by the sweep of the great staircase, stood the tall Colonel, his head bowed, and at his side a woman whose head was very close to his cropped crown. I sprang back into the darkened dining-hall, behind a great curtain, and held my breath as Félice Dauvray swept swiftly into the room, and then, throwing open the folding-doors, sat down, with a quiet smile mantling her firm lips, at the grand piano. She had been whispering to Ivan Luboff! I dared not ask myself if the Colonel was

also, in the pages of her *Libro d'Oro*. "It is a woman's own secret! Perhaps the story of some other past life episode!" I stealthily rejoined my still prisoned friends. "If she is not a shameless intrigante," I mused, "then, the black shadows are gathering down fast! The shadows of coming doom!"

When I told my fellow-culprits of the tableaux in the grand drawing-room, Zastrow's eyes blazed in a strange fire. "There is great danger in this! Let us go in! And for God's sake! no visible emotions!" I followed the two officers measuredly, for my heart was torn anew with the query of my fears. "Shall I tell them of the confidential attitude of *Félice*, the governess?" She was, after all, a defenseless woman, one of *Eve's* family, and, in my heart, too, rose up the protest, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" And yet, every heart beat was fainter, as I heard the Comtess Komaroff composedly say, with a pleased expression, "General Haxo will also call and pay his respects to-morrow, and he asks permission to present General Alexis Radzivill, also one of my husband's former staff officers!"

I was too busied in watching the strong glare of *Trepoff's* eyes and the ashen paleness of Zastrow's cheek to see the sudden tremor which shook the form of *Hermione de Vries*. She pressed her hands to her breast, and tottered.

With sharp cry of alarm, the nimble governess sprang up from the piano! "You are ill, Madame!"—and she glided to the side of my new sister, who was the center of an eagerly excited throng. Another new danger!

Sinking into a fauteuil, *Hermione* feebly closed her eyes, and faintly murmuring, "The heat, the lights!" she slowly sipped the cordial forced upon her. A strange glance of keen intelligence lit up the face of the attendant governess. "May I assist Madame to her room?" There was the ring of a suppressed triumph in her voice. *Hermione* faintly bowed; and then, escorted by the two officers, she moved away, and had reached the stairway before my brotherhood asserted itself. I was quickly at her side, as she slowly mounted the stair. "I fear I shall not be able to go out with you to-morrow, Walter," the

suffering woman slowly said, turning to me. "If I am not well, I will send for you and give you my commissions. But, do not be alarmed! It is only one of my usual nervous attacks!" She played her role well—the gallant stranger. "But, what had frightened her so?"

As I bent over her hand, and kissed it, while murmuring a few words of formal reply, the clear eyes of Félice Dauvray were busied searching my very soul. And the perfection of the vigorous womanhood of the Midi,—her strongly marked beauty,—seemed almost insolent in its triumph of glowing health. We three men then stole softly down the stair as Hermione de Vries turned at the door and softly said, "Good night!" Its accents fell like the sound of an angel's voice. Her exquisite figure, slender and graceful, in the rounded bloom of the perfection period between twenty-five and thirty; her dark brown eyes, with a sparkling point of light in their clear depths; her rich silken tresses, sweeping over a nobly poised neck down on shoulders of perfect mold,—were the attributes of a royal beauty whose delicate perfections were heightened by the exquisite low voice, breathing like the summer winds of the forest. As she stood with one rounded arm stretched out, in a wistful love signal to her silent slave Dimitri, the slender white hand, flashing with jewels, trembled like a leaf in the storm! She had robed herself in delicate fleecy-white silk; there were banded gleaming silvery pearls upon the ivory neck, and a great bunch of Parma violets at her bosom,—the tribute of far Italy and Dimitri's love offering. While Zastrow entered the drawing-room to reassure his stately relative, Trepoff and I sought again the shelter of the Turkish room. "Who and what is she, Dimitri?" I implored; for all the arts and graces seemed to linger around her in love. I had already heard her, in the brilliant circle of that initial dinner, speaking French, German and Italian, with the polyglot Zastrow, a very typical Russian, in his versatile gift of tongues. And, dowering her graceful form, the spirit of old romance, of a lost chivalry, the dauntless bravery of splendid ancestors, seemed to thrill the high-souled woman,

now seemingly on the very verge of detection. Of detection, and the forfeit of her life!

"Who is she? I know not!" solemnly cried Major Dimitri Trepoff; but his breast heaved in a silent agony. "What is she? She is my other soul! My own soul has known her in ages past; for the soul is deathless! My faith, my love, my devotion to that embodied spirit, will run on beyond the grave, to the bright star-guarded gates of Eternity!" He was lost in a soul exaltation.

"Grahame," he said, "if death comes to that woman, we will meet it together! Mine, in this world yet, I swear she shall be! Mine, in death, by the loyalty of our kindred spirits; for we are sealed in the sight of God, by our common love, our impending fate!"

"And yet," I gravely said, "Trepoff, you know nothing! You risk your whole family here to shield this strange beauty!" It was true.

"Faith is the evidence of things unseen!" he gravely answered, as Zastrow silently returned, quickly saying, "Let us now say adieu for the evening. Come in with me! I must go out to-night and see the Durand, and also, have this Haxo and his friend watched to-morrow! I shall sleep at your own rooms, Trepoff. Do you stay here! You can have one good, clear conference with Grahame! Leave here early to-morrow! I'll meet you at the Grand Duke's! And you, Walter, do not leave the house, save when I come to-morrow and send you out for an airing! I will have my coachman drive you out on the quai here. When General Haxo approaches, he will drive up the first, and then halt, as if by accident, before the door! I will then be able to screen Hermione from any chance meeting; for I shall have Vera Komaroff stand guard with her in her own room! No one can intrude there! We must keep Haxo away from her! His eyes would soon read all."

"Zastrow, you are a genius!—a good genius!" I cried. "Get us both out of here, as quickly as you can!" "I will do so, the very moment I can induce Madame Komaroff to go back to Warsaw!" he answered. "For if our high society finds her here, then the house will be overrun, our own safety will vanish, and, God knows

what may happen! I will set my good fairy Vera at work!"

He was gone; for he left as soon as we could make our evening adieu to our noble hosts, and we three men, with beating hearts, had watched little Olga Zastrow's evening devotions, before the splendid jeweled icon, which hung in the dominant corner of the grand old salon. There, while the aged General and his wife murmured a prayer for the vanished father of the little praying innocent, we, brothers now in our sad misgivings, haunted with fears of the morrow, vowed a new faith and breathed a secret supplication for the gentle stranger driven now to bay in the old granite mansion! As I turned away, with a moistened eye, to lead Trepoff up to my room, the steady gaze of the waiting governess burned into my very soul; but she only murmured an indistinct salutation, as I bowed deeply in passing. I feared that strange, hard woman.

It was late in the gloomy watches of the night before Major Trepoff had rehearsed all his new hopes and old fears. His brow was ploughed with deep wrinkles of care, as he at last wearily said, "I shall not see you tomorrow! Remember! For God's sake! always keep your self-control! One false step ruins all! Our bridge is only that of Al Serat,—a single hair!" His voice trembled as he grasped my two hands. "I fear Hermione is breaking down at last!" he sadly whispered.

"Brothers evermore, for we fight now together for her life!" I whispered to him.

And when the gallant soldier left me, I sat confused in a dazed state of mingled reaction and apprehension, till the first bells of the morning prayers rang. And yet, my night vigil brought no golden wisdom. We were under the ban. I threw myself down to dream, and all the restless morning hours I was haunted, in my dull sleep, by the horrible agony of drowning; for I was in deep waters,—and, clinging to me, Félice Dauvray was dragging me down, down, to the black depths, as her prey!

My heart was too sick and sore, as I was bundled up in the late afternoon, for the decoy promenade drive in

General Zastrow's family sleigh. The beautiful sister of my dangerous secret adoption had guarded her room all the morning, and it was only dainty Vera at the breakfast table, who informed all our anxious circle that Madeleine was still lying in her darkened room, too ill even to see even me for a single moment. And then, the face of Félice Dauvray wore a most puzzled expression, as she watched the sprightly child at her side, with her hawk-like eyes. It was half-past four o'clock, when a magnificently appointed sleigh turned down upon the Admiralty Quai, where I had been "standing off and on" for an hour. Bundled up in furs, I enjoyed the inspiring scene of the noble sheet of water before me, widening out far below to the guarded approaches of the Gulf of Finland. The black and yellow imperial family ensign floated proudly there in front of me, on the magnificent royal yacht "Polar Star," lying in the Neva, near a saucy little gunboat; and a trim corvette danced on the current, floating enormous blue and white crossed ensigns of battle day dimensions. Far away to the southwest, my eye rested on the wooded point of beautiful Peterhof, and across the icy flood to the north the dim spires of the temple covering the ashes of twenty dead Czars and Czarinas rose out of the fortress enclosure. "A palace and a prison on either hand!" in this northern Venice of "a voiceless woe!" I could only see two military caps peeping out of great furred capotes, as the three white-starred orloffs dashed along toward the Zastrow mansion. My heart quickened as my watchful coachman then twisted my own sleigh dexterously in ahead of the new-comers. It was truly the dreaded visit.

I hastened up stairs past the butler, and, on the landing, met Captain Serge Zastrow in front of my rooms. He followed me in. It was a supreme moment of dread.

"I will soon saunter into the drawing-rooms! Stay here and I will report! The whole town—the 'beau monde'—has been showering cards upon Madame Komaroff and Vera all the afternoon! How could the golden circle have known of their arrival!" Serge spoke rapidly, but he was cool and ready for any juncture.

With a gloomy presentiment of some coming trouble, I said: "Luboff spread the news!"

"You are right!" hurriedly replied Zastrow. "And, I only fear that many tempting invitations may tie down Madame la Comtesse here for a few days longer than we hoped. She is a great favorite. But, it would keep us ever on the rack; and, there is danger lurking now in every shadow!"

"Right!" I growled, as I threw off my heavy furs. For the stolen letters, the colloquy between Luboff and the adventurous governess, now weighed heavily upon my soul. "Thank God! Hermione is safely hidden—shielded by the only sanctuary left to her, the sick room of a woman! For, none can decently force themselves on her privacy there!"

A vision of the cat-like Félise flashed on my excited brain. "Hermione must be warned against her by me! And, also to keep all her own packages securely locked!" I smiled even in my suffering; for Zastrow had told me the acute Durand had doubly verified the fact of not a mark or paper in the luggage of the wanderer. It seemed hardly necessary; and yet, we were in Russia!

"Can she long remain in that isolated safety without social suspicions? Can I not make the severe climate a pretext for her immediate southward voyage?" So I mused,—and yet, how would we get out alone? We needed aid.

Zastrow's return, gloomy browed, only filled me with a new dismay. He locked the door and drew me at once to a seat in the middle of the room. He viciously puffed his cigarette. "The devil surely fights against us!" he slowly said. "I lingered down there with my uncle and aunt while General Haxo and this stranger Radzivil paid their respects to the Komaroffs. I have always been on pretty good terms with General Haxo, to whom I have often done the social honors of Cronstadt, when I was a Fleet-Staff Lieutenant. I bowed in acknowledgment only to the stranger, whom, in fact, I could hardly see, as he was busied chatting with Vera; but, to my astonishment, General Haxo drew me at once aside. 'Zastrow,' he gayly cried, sotto voce, 'where's



your beautiful visitor,—the American? I had hoped to meet her! Luboff says that she is the handsomest woman he has ever seen, even on the Neva! That is a tempting story!

"Now, Grahame," regretfully said the Captain, "this is the very worst danger of all! Haxo seems as curious and eager as a magpie. I muttered some remarks about illness, and early departure! A bright thought also came to me. 'She will not go into society,' I interpolated, 'for, she can not speak a single word of Russian!'

"True!" laughed General Haxo, as he grasped his sword and prepared to make way for a society delegation of ladies. 'But, Luboff says that her French, German and Italian are simply perfect! I think that I could make myself understood! She should stay with us!'" Poor Zastrow groaned in dismay.

"Now, that's my whole story! I did not quite like the gleam of his cunning eyes!" said Captain Zastrow. "It may be that he only feels piqued,—it perhaps is only a mad social curiosity to meet Hermione, dictated by Colonel Luboff's evident enthusiasm. I never saw a man as swept away by a woman's appearance as Luboff was the other night! If you only knew St. Petersburg as I do, you could understand the craze of these two military dandies over a new face! Especially with men placed like Haxo and Luboff, foreign ladies are a specialty, especially travelers! For the fair diplomats all shun the name of 'Police,'—even when military! The great dignitaries also despise officers who accept such duty. Now, Count Mouravieff and that exquisite grande dame, the Countess, also called to pay their respects to General Komaroff's wife and daughter. Mouravieff as an ex-Ambassador to Turkey and England, as the present President of the Privy Council, and his haughty wife, who is princely born, fairly froze Haxo and the other General! So, they stood not on the order of their going!"

"Then the presence of these powerful friends is a help to us!" I hopefully said, for I was heartily tired of the pent-up anxieties. My suspense was almost maddening. I wished to shake the snows of Russia off from

my ulster, and hie "from lands of snows to lands of sun!" I was now deciding to consider "personal risk" as a considerable element of my fat fee, soon chargeable against that matter of the four cruisers. "No, no!" I growled. "Life is not long enough to spend it in Russia! As for lonely sylvan scenes, with snowy foreground; rearing horses, frightened moujiks, and remarkably active looking wolves in the right and left middle distances, I can study all that on the walls, in Schreyer's harmless canvases! I have no doubt that they are faithful to the wild steppe life. I'll take his artistic word for it, at any rate."

Zastrow was now calmly rolling a cigarette. He looked up. "These powerful friends are only a splendid background for our neat little fiction! They accept you and Hermione,—on trust! We could readily count on them, in any private matter of any nature, no matter how grave! For, kissing goes by favors in this strange land! But, any police trouble,—any so-called conspiracy muddle,—goes right before the summary military courts; and, alas! no one can then help! For the harm is always wrought, the culprit's doom is sealed, before friendly influence, even the highest, can avail! And, to save the feelings of the imperial family, the Privy Council handles all revisions of these cases, coming under the 'repressive' orders! The Grand Duke Constantine is simply relentless in hunting down all enemies of the imperial family! The terrible death of the late Emperor, the agony of the present Empress, once the lovely Dagmar, over letters, red scrawls, hideous pictures, and all these grim bug-a-boos, has maddened the personal friends of the royal pair! In the palace rooms, in the Imperial carriages, on the royal yachts, in the special railway trains, these nightmare things are often deftly secreted! They have even been hurled into the Empress' own carriage at military reviews! In crowds, coming from the opera, they are received, and they have been pinned to the very pillows of the imperial children! Awful hideous threats! The railways, too, are mined; society is all undermined; the great explosion at the Winter Palace hurled sixty men to a sudden death, beneath the feet of a crowd of twenty royal scions! Only the temporary indisposition of a

visiting German dignitary saved the whole imperial family there from a bloody death then. It was a horrid scheme. So, if these police tyrants dog us, any detention of Hermione means to her only death! To us all, family ruin; and then, at least, banishment for life! Now, should General Haxo's offensive gallantry or Luboff's evil eye set them on a still hunt after this new beauty, it would not be very long till they would find out some sure way to involve her, so as to get her over there to the fortress, to detain her, near them, helpless—in their power!" he groaned.

"Zastrow, you have surely taken fearful risks in this!" I cried, in a renewed apprehension. "I had to do it,—for Trepoff! And, I pray to God, we are not all finally overwhelmed!" he answered. "Those fellows might bring forward at their ease any kind of incriminating evidence,—over there! I believe in Hermione! I know that she has simply played the part of messenger with those trashy revolutionary ciphers! All the women of France in '93 were doing the same! The English Jacobites, too, have done the very wildest things! I do not wish to see this noble woman, foolish though she may have been, meet the end of a Jeanne d'Arc, a Charlotte Corday, a Lamballe, or a Marie Antoinette! If any luckless slip of ours, give them the chance, Hermione may spend lonely months over there,"—he gloomily pointed,— "and, with only men like Haxo, or Luboff, to meet in the deep obscurity of the dungeon! In those awful underground casemates, the shrieks and yells of those whom God has forgotten, never even rouse the brutal sentinels walking overhead! They have ways, over there, to daunt the most fearless heart; to break the very strongest will! The common executioner waits ready to reward an obdurate resistance!"

"I should think, Zastrow," was my response, "that you would not expose Hermione to the risks of this open salon, where almost any dignitary of Petersburg may now meet her! Where, as you say, General Haxo, Luboff, and that class of dangerous intriguants, cannot be excluded!" He paused in deep thought.

"Ah! Grahame," he replied, "we must still keep up

the dumb show so easily imposed on the old General and his wife! Hermione must, at least, join the family at all the dinners, and in the evening also. Remember, even that cursed French woman has eyes! You must play your brotherly rôle to the letter—perfect—to-morrow! Go in and out of her rooms frequently. Take all innocent liberties, and, I will see that she is warned to retire when these callers come! She can easily plead the valid excuse of not speaking Russian, and also her early departure!”

“I will do as you say! You are right! I have been so far very clumsy. But, I can hardly believe General Haxo is a fiend at heart! He looks gentlemanly—even soldierly!”

“He is hardly a bad man at heart—though a crazy voluptuary!” mused Zastrow. “He was really selected for efficiency, and it is an open secret that the Grand Duke Constantine himself inspires his greatest acts of severity. But, it is far different with Ivan Luboff! He is a brute at heart! It was he who gave the late Emperor that devil dog, ‘Golden,’ who tore a dozen persons half to pieces for innocently approaching the Emperor’s person. How they ever trained that fiend from hell, I do not know!”

“It was Luboff also who planned the room, with a hollow wainscoting, and all its secret cabinets, for the forty soldiers! It was he, too, who devised the masked corridor, with a hidden gallery arranged so that all petitioners and those approaching the imperial presence were continually under the range of a dozen ready rifles for forty paces! His agents in black masks, besides, have inspected every room in the palace, striking terror to all the superstitious servants and underlings! He learned his skilled brutality under the cover of the great gloomy stone quadrangle of the Vassili Ostrov! I do not know if he invented that disappearing chair, which often took the suspected down from an apparently social interview, to be hurried into closed black wagons below and driven from thence to the fortress! A damnable ingenious contrivance!”

"I fancied that such tales were merely yarns of the novelists' imagination!" I whispered.

"Grahame!" solemnly said Zastrow; "over two hundred well-known people suddenly disappeared after that great explosion (the fatal one), and some of these were taken on the street! Even foreigners who had foolishly meddled were among these vanished ones. One young fellow, only for crossing a room, at an elegant ball, and merely speaking with Sophie Perovsky, was banished to Siberia! And, in fact, the long boxes, made rectangular to hide their true character, hauled away at night by wagon loads from the grim place I named, were sometimes tenanted by the bodies of those who had been strangled there, forthwith!

"When a brute like Luboff, who has graduated from such ghastly scenes, is given a lease of power, then, God help the man or woman who falls into his clutches!"

"Amen!" I said, as the dinner dressing bell rang out. I was just sufficiently alarmed to spread a too-sprightly gayety over my social behavior that evening. I saw the demure Félise Dauvray watching me, with a quietly amused expression. As the Yankees say, "I laid it on too thick." Her shifting face recalled to me then, her dangerous causerie with Colonel Ivan Luboff. And, the wine became bitter, indeed, to me, when I thought, with a sudden fear, that for eight long anxious days I had received no letters from Paris! I feared that I knew the reason.

And my stolen family archives,—where were they? "In whose vile hands?" I moderated my gayety, and then sought the rooms of my alleged sister. While Zastrow carried the heavy burden of his cares under a light mask of gayety, in the crowded salons, I timidly knocked at the door of my "sister's" rooms. On entering, I was not surprised to find the sufferer still in the necessary rôle of invalid. My stay was a brief one; for I learned that Hermione had not only sedulously played her part, but that she was suffering deeply.

"You may think that I am only dallying with the convenient sham of sickness," she whispered; "but the shadow of doom hangs over us! That artful French wo-

man has sought a dozen excuses to enter my rooms to-day, under the pretense of solicitude for my supposed illness! I begin to fear her, and I long—oh! I crave—to get away, even at any risk! To make the attempt; for,”—she broke down sobbing as her hands clasped mine convulsively,—“I fear! I fear!”

“What?” I murmured.

“Oh! I cannot—I dare not—tell you! All my haunting fears! Do not ask me! It is too horrible!” And I was fain to calm her; for she was crushed.

“Now, listen to me!” I tried to cheer her. “Zastrow will have you driven out, under the protection of Countess Vera, to-morrow! He will also skillfully protect you from further sudden social intrusions! I will remain here in the house on watch! Trepoff will also avoid the house, and court his daily duties! As soon as Madame Komaroff can be gently molded to our will, you and I will proceed with them at once to Warsaw! One night of ‘good fairy’ protection there, and then we will be happily over the frontier, and out of darkest Russia! You would not bring ruin on the General, or down now on our friends!”

“Death first!” the spirited woman cried. “If it were not for the useless exposure of Zastrow and Trepoff,—I would steal out to-night and try and run the gauntlet myself, alone, in peasant garb! I might dye my poor tell-tale face! I can speak”—and she suddenly stopped, as I said:

“You could not dye your form,—your bearing,—your graceful carriage! No! You would be only a self-sacrificed woman!”

My warning to watch her luggage was most gravely received. “I have already studied that! An admired disorder reigns in all my boxes! And,—thank Heaven!—there are no marks,—no papers! Even my own jewels are not to be tell-tale evidence!” She pointed to a traveling case. “All unmarked, too!”

“You must have studied this desperate voyage with great care!” I finally said, as I rose.

“Too long! Too devotedly!” she murmured in reply. “Good night, Brother!” she then faintly smiled.

"And, to you I leave the faithful watch of my rooms to-morrow! I fear,—I do not know what!—something!—and,—always the very worst!"

"I will send for you to come in the morning,—when I am ready for my ride,—and you may then take me down to the salon, as if we had been conferring on business!" I longed to tell her my own secret of the stolen letters! The story of the governess and Luboff, too, trembled on my tongue! Yet, I feared to provoke her own gloomy disclosure. And so, I stole away, with a forced composure,—to listen to Mademoiselle Dauvray's really exquisite music,—and, over the ten o'clock tea, to hear old General Zastrow tell of his Crimean episodes.

Zastrow,—a most courteous interpreter,—cheered me up, as we parted for the night. A week more at most! And,—then, hurrah for the way out! I was more resigned than comforted; for I had always a dull, aching band pressing upon my brain,—and, I slept only the dreamless sleep of exhaustion! It was a horrible agony—this life under the suspended sword of Fate! The Zastrow mansion was greatly enlivened the next day by Captain Zastrow's excursion with Madame Komaroff, for a round of formal return visits, and I was quite the brother à la mode,—as I waived adieu to Countess Vera and the pallid-faced Hermione, who was now so successfully muffled up as to be able to defy even General Haxo's sharp eyes. It was a day of peace—of rest, of brightening hopes! In my own rooms, busied with writing and a careless turning over of a few fresh reviews and journals, I suddenly thought of the lonely, unguarded apartment of my strange sister! An uneasy feeling at once came over me! "If Mademoiselle tries to rummage there,—I will take the fair brotherly privilege of interrupting her!" My legal nerve had availed me in a quiet watch of that interesting, broad-browed young person, whose supple grace and firm, decided movements, with her easy freedom, proved a perfect union of spirit, soul, and body! She had drifted by sheer quiet self-assertion into a veiled but effective control of the whole household. "It will surely be in the early afternoon, my lady!" I thought, as

I remembered the gay child's necessarily regular lessons, of which I had most audible evidence.

Seating myself on watch, where I could see the entrances of Hermione's rooms, by a guarded arrangement of my own, I felt a quick flutter of the heart when Félise Dauvray glided at last into the absent woman's apartments! My heart beat violently, as after a few minutes, I then noiselessly crossed the hall,—and, with an affected carelessness, entered the room,—with an emptied inkstand in my hand. A gentle fraud of my own! I started back in surprise! There,—on her knees, beside Hermione's locked boxes,—the governess crouched,—and she turned a white and startled face at first upon me!

"I beg pardon!" I gravely remarked,—closely scanning her most compromising position!

"Ah-h! Ciel! How you frightened me! Monsieur Gra-hame!" she softly murmured, as she rose, panting. "What a misfortune! I have lost one of the jewels from one of my few family rings! I have carefully searched everywhere else; and, I thought,—perhaps,—in aiding Mademoiselle Gra-hame,—I had lost it here! A family jewel!"

Her aplomb was perfect,—and with the easy gesticulation of her witty race, she then waved her shapely hand before me. And, in an unconcerned manner, continued her search in every corner.

"I must ask all the servants to aid—to sweep! Pardon!"—and then, with an unconstrained bow she was gone. She had caught her second wind—the sly boots! I filled my inkstand from Hermione's desk, and then, leaving the door partly opened, resumed my labors. "The first round—a draw!" I grimly decided. For a half-hour the graceful French woman led around a busy train of the domestics after her in her anxious search. Was this an innocent little fraud? I fear so;—and—the long day wore on.

There was only the calm of a family happiness brooding around the dinner table, accentuated by the general rejoicings of the circle at Hermione's reappearance, when we reassembled.



My heart froze within me, in a feeling of another vanished hope, however, as Madame Komaroff turned and remarked, with a most gracious smile, to my sister, "I can promise you a very rare pleasure for a stranger. The Mouravieffs have placed two opera boxes at my disposal for the gala performance which is to occur next week! The Emperor and Empress are both expected to be present! It will thus be a great occasion, and I shall commission our young knights to escort you and Vera! There will be also room for Mr. Grahame; or else Dimitri can burden himself with us!"—as Countess Komaroff smiled at her hostess, I felt that we were surely to be brought face to face with the most dangerous social ordeal. A red spot flamed out on Zastrow's cheeks as he murmured, "With all my heart!"—and then bent over his glass.

"It will, perhaps, be your only chance, my dear young lady," calmly continued the patrician visitor, whose every wish was law,—"to see our gilded circle in all its parade bravery before we all return to Warsaw! For, our border city is far inferior to this grand Babel! It is, after all, only a frontier fortress now!" she sighed.

No one dared to find any sudden excuse for a valid refusal, and I was decidedly heavy-hearted, as we separated for the night.

"If luck does not aid us,—in some unforeseen way,—we must try to face this thing, and to shield Hermione,—and then,—after this opera party, leave for Warsaw just as soon as possible! I will work on Vera!" muttered Zastrow, who had again most assiduously courted Hermione,—all the long evening,—under the burning eyes of the jealous Félise!

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## CHAPTER V

### WARNED AND WATCHED.

I began to feel stifled by the dangerous atmosphere of the patrician house on the Admiralty Quai, when Captain Zastrow and I smoked our after breakfast cigars at ease, the next morning I remarked to him: "This hidden game

is too much for me! I am failing! I must make a diversion! I have thoroughly established myself here in the normal character of brother, and I only fear now to be caught napping by that ardent young woman, whom you so infelicitously attached to your fortunes, in those fatal summer days at Cronstadt! I have thoroughly warned Hermione. She, too, is on her guard, and she now tells me that Trepoff has adroitly arranged to meet her, as if by accident, at Madame Mouravieff's reception this afternoon. There, a secluded boudoir will be at their disposal, with Vera as a watchful guardian! For those two ladies can apparently busy themselves, and Madame Zastrow and Vera's mother are also occupied. This will enable our lovers to free their minds! I will show myself to-day around the city alone. I will go down to the departments and publicly visit the hotels and shops. We must spread out."

"It is a very good idea. It will certainly cheer you up," replied Serge. "For, while waiting for the Warsaw departure, you can even go out alone in the evenings. The more do we scatter ourselves the better. But either you or I must always stay here on guard, to aid and watch over Hermione each evening. As for Dimitri, he tells me that he is no longer followed, nor dogged, and watched at present. Somebody has tired of their attentions to us. His desperate public devotion to the little actress has already earned him the proud distinction of a good deal of extra gossip. Even one of the young grand dukes whispered to him laughingly, 'Major, she is very good form; where did you find her?' Now, if all goes on well, Trepoff can get a three-months' leave later, and going over himself to Stockholm, can quietly take a steamer to Havre or Hamburg, and then meet Hermione in Switzerland, or even England, when she is out of Russia. For, he seems to live only for the future and to marry this meteor!" "Do you think that Haxo has relaxed his sly investigation?" I questioned, for I was burdened with my own secret knowledge! I trembled for my letters!

"Well!" slowly considered Zastrow, "it looks that way. They have not repeated their official call, and we have all

dropped smoothly into this easy family life. You see that dear old General Zastrow never lifts his eyes to follow us. Hospitality is his second religion. He plays hours with little Olga, rides out with his dear old sweetheart wife, or moons away over these interminable Crimean campaigns which gave him a dozen medals, even if they broke the heart of the proud Nicholas!

"Russia's present strength is born of that terribly humiliating exposition of our military weakness, even burdened with colossal numbers, and notwithstanding our untold sacrifices and dogged bravery! Yes, you can safely stir around. It will serve to clear your mind, and can do no harm. I will watch inside and outside," he concluded. "If I could only avert that unwelcome opera party! But, it is fate!"

"One thing you can avert," I warned him. "Moderate your loverlike attentions, and the marked empressment, as regards our friend Hermione. You must consider the situation. You go on too far, too far! I observe that Félise Dauvray does not watch the sweet little Countess Vera at all. Vera evidently understands you!" He smiled knowingly. "Her presence here is a natural result of the family intimacy. But you may incite this jealous soubrette to some mean attempt at revenge. Do you not see that she would gladly do anything to get Hermione out of the way, for, believe me, never yet was the discarded woman who did not hope to win her lover back! Never yet a woman who had loved as you say this cool governess did love once but secretly clung to the man once under her empire. To see you lavishing your apparent tenderness on another, under her eyes, is an agony."

"You are quite an enthusiast, an expert in love matters," he laughed. "Grahame! I will cool down! I will divide myself up a little! It is prudent! I only acted to show off the Dauvray! I must shield Vera! As to Félise, I have seen nothing in her conduct savoring of hidden anger." He was a little sheepish over his past victory in the flower-decked fields of Venus. The rosy record rose up before him to accuse.

"Certainly not. General Haxo even is not likely to per-

sonally glower at Dimitri Trepoff. These people do not wear their hearts on their sleeves! But, there's his enemy always in his eye. And this remarkably vigorous and handsome young French woman is yours. She hates you—until she has called you back. A tropical storm of tenderness would kill you. There is but one saving piece of strategy left for you. If you could only bring in some other man who would engage her, the amatory Félice, in a new love affair. That would be a very fortress of defense! A rock of refuge!"

"Ah! Impossible!" replied Zastrow. "You see, Graham, while these high class tutors and governesses are all treated with a due ceremonial courtesy in the family,—they are not at all considered as social equals!—Independent acquaintance,—personal friendships,—any real participation in society life, is an utter impossibility for them! No man of rank in Russia would be able to openly devote himself to a woman in such a position. I care not how superior she is! Either she would be met, only secretly, in a distant social circle,—or else the love episode out of Russia! In a real passion,—the very first step towards social equality, would be such a person quitting forever her calling! She could retire into even modest poverty,—the humblest surroundings, and then, honorably marry above her rank! But,—while in the professional rank,—a free social equality is absolutely impossible! If I could only get some gay young devil to run off with her!" he sighed. "But that is, alas! impossible! She has a very snug nest of her own here! And she knows it! She is allowed a freedom due largely to the fact that there are no young gentlemen or ladies in the house! The question of etiquette does not come up at all with Olga,—a mere child,—as yet. She must obey! No! Félice knows and values her place! She has her own schemes, too!"

"And,—to be run off—she would also have to be willing! True, what I know of her,—she would be a very serious charge! Moreover, it would make a present scandal, and it would cloud our whole presence here! Ah! No! Such women's little games are only played,—to the last card,—in those wealthy households where some old

patrician falls alone,—under their soft blandishments;—or else, on distant country estates where some wild young nobles may carry on an ignoble intrigue,—strictly veiled from the other members of the family! These episodes are always the result of idle hours, and lonely surroundings! No! I must quietly drift along past Félise's bal-  
lenes,—and,—when I marry,—then take Vera at once away—until I have got the sly Félise forever out of this household! After my marriage, I should not hesitate to dig a pit for her feet! I will do it then!—for Olga's sake! And,—yet—I do not like to follow her up! I would rather she would dig the pit herself!"

"Beware that she does not dig one for you,—here,—now, Serge,—and so endanger your happy marriage!"

I was only too eager to tell him all,—and,—yet,—I dared not! The Captain laughed.

"Oh! Grahame! You take these little things too seriously,—in your own practical American style! The fact is,—Félise has eminently the prehensile nature! She will soon get her velvet-sheathed claws upon someone else—and—then,—forget me! These denizens of Russia have their facile hearts fitted up with compartments,—ranging from A to Z. Their expressive eyes are like lighthouses! They shine for all! Remember what Byron says of the woman lancée! First, she loves—the lover! Then, the habit of loving!—It "fits her loosely,—like an easy glove!" No! Walter! This sly devil is simply waiting till the Komaroffs go away.—She will then make her running on me,—for a last appeal! Tears and sighs! If she sees, at last, that I am not to be 'called back,' then her little masked batteries will open on Trepoff,—or, with that strange discernment of these fair sinners,—some other equally eligible man! There is a splendid circle of my dead cousin's officer friends and old comrades who call here, in kindly memory,—to testify their respect for his mourning parents, and also to chatter an hour with the graceful child! I shall probably have one good tropical storm when you go! And then,—thank Heavens—the atmosphere will clear!"

He was so bothered that I burst out laughing! He was afraid of his record!

"Aye—she looted the tears down fa,—for Jock o' Hazledean," I murmured, as I watched Serge Zastrow,—the recalcitrant lover.—I sighed to think that he was a type of those dangerous sailor chaps,—always eagerly answering love's signals—for close quarters,—and then,—alas! so quick to run out of range of the fair enemy's guns!

"I suppose that yours has been a somewhat adventurous career—in this myrtle-shaded pathway of love!" said I.

"Oh! I have had *mes beaux jours*!"—modestly replied Zastrow,—“but, on the whole,—my past has been only an encyclopedia of regrets,—my vulnerable heart is deeply scarred with the marks of grappling-hooks—though lightly shaken off!”

“Can I do anything further for you to-day?” he gayly demanded. “I shall breakfast with Trepoff, at Donon's, *én cabinet particulier*, and there meet his supposed enslaver! He has made quite a clatter around town with his little ‘indiscretion,’ for several of the ‘high life’ circle are desperately trying to cut out his fair prize,—from under his very guns!”

“Yes! That was a success!”

“I should fancy such a social *faux pas* might embroil such a man with the Grand Duke,—and,—even the ladies of the ‘haut monde’! It would,—I know,—in America! It would be noised near and far!”

“Bah!” lightly cried Zastrow. “You do not know the infinite charity of the Russian ladies,—who only admire a man for his prowess in the field,—or else in the soft conquests of love!—Mars and Venus go hand in hand with us. We have not the affected canting hypocrisy of English society,—or the absurd Puritanism of your own socially unsettled land! There is a naturalness in the relation of the sexes in Russia to which we owe the vigor of our race,—the high spirit of our men and women,—and the inexpressible life and verve which tones up all our social life! It is a strange paradox! The flame of love burns nowhere fiercer than in our chilly land from the White Sea to the Ochotsk! From Cape Tchelyskin to Tashkend every woman seems to regard each man she meets as a possible lover,—and to be prepared for the

gentle artifices which may end either in her becoming a proud conqueror, or a softly entreating victim! There is an inexhaustible fund of love-making power in the Russian cavalier which proves him to be a master of this art of arts! Oh! No!" he laughed, "Trepoff will not come to grief! It would be a vulgar provincialism for the men to lift their eyebrows,—and the women, softly smiling, will merely murmur, 'I told you so! He is a gallant fellow,—and, a born devil! quite a triumph!'"

"Many a fluttering fan will call Trepoff to the side of women glad to know the victor in a little love tournament, wherein it is whispered—even one of the irresistible young Grand Dukes has couched his lance in vain! It's the very safest thing for him, now, to keep this racket up! He has taken his little social prescription most cheerfully! I must say that! He plays his part even too well!"

"You can do something for me, Serge!" I remarked, after a secret council of war of one! "I am going down to the Winter Garden to-night! I will take a little private look at that arctic Closerie de Lilas,—and—in my own humble way,—imitate your dashing Dimitri! For I can be a bit reckless, too!"

Regardless of Zastrow's incredulous smile,—I said very gravely, "And, I wish you to beg the Durand woman to meet me there, at the restaurant, for supper. I must see her! It is important to me, and—private!"

"All right!" cheerfully said Zastrow. "But,—you are a very devil of a fellow for a Philadelphia lawyer!—a knight of the green bag! I only wish you had been born into the Chevalier-Garde! But, you shall have your little flirtation with Marie Durand! You are safe in her hands!"

He left me in high good humor, and winked as he strolled away! He did not know my secret cares: Those letters!

I was myself happy on my return to the house in the afternoon. For, as on many other occasions, neglected business had moved itself on! At the Department, I found all the interminable papers of my claim had been pushed through, by some pressing affairs moving on behind them. The great Bismarck maintains rightly that

one-half of current affairs settle themselves! Not only was I now free to go home, but, a fat fee and a highly flattering reception surely awaited me in Philadelphia. I felt at peace with all the world, and the pale wintry sun warmed up many degrees!

It was hard for me to believe in the hidden currents whirling along under the smooth-surfaced Hellgate of Petersburg society. For, my heart was lifted up a little! As I drove around the streets,—the passing show,—the glittering crowds, the throb and thrill of a great city, all inspirited me,—and I was highly keyed up with my neat professional success!

“I will outwit them all yet!” I fancied, and then I sought in my mind for a safe and sly ready means of sending forth my latest news and some private intelligence to America. A lucky inspiration seized upon me! If the society of the nameless can run letters in here past the frontiers, then they may far more easily run them out! They have many chances! I will write several unsigned letters to my Paris bankers, and also send them a cablegram to my clients in Philadelphia, and also a sealed letter, without address, which I can simply say is to be sent at once to my sister! The bankers will understand all!

I was so elated with the discovery that thus, neither my own name nor hers would appear to be a guide to the police that I whistled in glee as I rode along, which American barbarism evoked the great surprise of others gaily rolling by! For only a land of freedom is a land of whistlers! The sibilant notes of joy issue not from the unpuckered lips of the dwellers under the shadow of the mailed arm of the Tsar!

“I will give these to Durand,—coupled with a fifty-ruble note,—and thus I shall laugh you all to scorn!”

I snapped my fingers gayly at that ogre of Russian tyranny,—the unlovely Colonel Ivan Luboff,—as I dressed for dinner!

The stories of the easy-going love life of the upper classes in Russia had given me a possible new key to General Haxo’s conduct! “I must confer with Serge!” I decided.

Now, General Haxo, lingering in his splendid state,



near the Grand Duke Constantine, may have merely been struck by Hermione's witching beauty! It would be easy for him to distinguish her as a new face,—a stranger one,—open to his arts. I wonder if he only sought to scrape an amatory acquaintance,—to pursue her with no grimmer ideas of torture than the gentle pangs of one of these "go as you please" Russian passions! For, it seems from Zastrow's spirited remarks, that these frankly indelicate pursuits by the sons of Adam are by no means uncommon. Rather the rule. She may have lingered in the Marble Palace,—while waiting for the sharer of her dangerous tryst! Luboff, too, may have seen her there. Now that they have finally run her to earth, here—the friendship of the Zastrows,—the powerful Komaroffs,—the proud Mouravieffs,—may have cooled the ardor of these military Lovelaces! They may be afraid to thrust their unblushing attentions upon a woman who has rank and recognition here! Sour grapes!

Zastrow laughed at this theory as he joined me before the sounding of the silver gong! "You may be right,—my legal Don Juan.—You are a great intellect,—Grahame!" he said, with a very wicked smile! "Now will you have a sleigh from the house for your own Paphian meanderings to-night?"

"Oh! No!" I answered. "I'll catch one up on the Place Rasvodni. I shall brave my fortunes alone!" And Zastrow smiled devilishly. I stole away from the now happy circle at the table, taking advantage of the evening departure of Mademoiselle Dauvray with pretty Olga! My papers for the mail were all prepared, and so I lingered for a half an hour with the two gentlemen over a cigar, while waiting the time when I could repair to the merry Winter Garden!

"She'll be there!" gayly cried Zastrow. "I carried your soft summons! Don't push your conquest too far!" he rallied me. "Think of your faith—pledged in Philadelphia. For, the Durand is yet fairly presentable!"

My substantial evening make-up was a deliberate imitation of the heavy English tourist! I thought, with pride in my acumen, that Englishmen were safe all the world over. The Queen's substantial shadow covers them all!

A last fear shook my nerve! After I had exchanged a few words with Hermione, in her own rooms, and then, been made the bearer of a note of orders for our steadfast ally,—I descended the stair, coming face to face suddenly with Mademoiselle Dauvray,—who was also robed for an outing,—I was at a loss for a remark to vary the formal bow! I had timorously tried to win her good graces, and to veil any apparent distrust! But, Félise was the prude of prudes! Coy, so very coy! And, her eyes always dropped before me, as if she were a submissive handmaiden of patriarchal days! A soft, sleek, smooth specimen of governesses.

"Did you find your lost jewel, Mademoiselle?" I casually said.

"Thanks, yes, Monsieur! In fact,"—she smiled,—*"I am going to the jeweler's now."* With a pleasant nod, she passed out into the night!

"Not so very dangerous looking! She has certainly charming ways of her own!" I soliloquized. I did not wonder at the effect of her liquid eyes, at short range, on the sailor's tender heart! Dragging Zastrow away into a safe corner, while the old General waited for an evening game of piquet,—I anxiously questioned him! "They can't trace me about that tunnel affair! I am in no danger in the Winter Garden, am I? No trap set for me! No spies."

"Oh! No! Simply watch over yourself there. Don't get mixed up in the crowds! You, of course, could not take care of yourself if anything serious happened! As for the underground cave,—its history has been officially traced,—and it has made quite a stir in local circles! But, it is all old matter now! We are all clear of that entanglement. They look farther back than our party as to that!"

"You see," he said, "when Loris Melikoff was dictator, pour le moment,—this tunnel was dug by some mad people who wished to lay a mine under the street, through which the Czar would have to go, in a solemn procession, to the sacred Kazan cathedral! There was an infinite labor wasted in its construction! The booths in the Italiansky have all had a dozen occupants since then!

These traders come and go! The earth must have been secretly carried away in boxes, packages and handbags, and then thrown into the Neva at night. The foundation walls and street arches also kept the water of the marshes out! A dog-hole branch leading to a loaded crater under the street has been also traced out! It is now openly whispered that an anonymous letter warned the Czar of the plan,—and that the route of the procession was suddenly changed after it started. They only knew it was on the old line. Evidently the chamber under the street was afterwards unloaded, for the hidden electric wires are fixed and leading still there! The explosives intended for a national crime were safely hidden in this underground room, and then left behind to execute a mute automatic vengeance on the hated police! It seems to be clear that this old haunt has been only used as a temporary meeting and hiding place! It was far too small for a secret printing den, the smoke and steam might easily betray them! Any great activity would have attracted instant attention! The old restaurant and eating house, at the other end of the ingeniously arranged gallery was operated by a lot of humble social malcontents, and at one time even poor Sophie Perovska worked there, living with one of her four principal lovers! For, it seems that, poor foolish girl! she only used her charms to draw in those needed by their unholy cause! A talented young chemist was one of her victims,—and, also the desperate student, who only left a piece of a hand and a wristband as a ghastly token after the great tragedy! He was nerved up by her love to throw a bomb which shook the whole world! Strange love craze—leading on to death!”

Zastrow concluded: “I made it my own business to make some confidential researches about this tunnel. In the brief history of these people it seems that several succeeding bands have used this dangerous lurking place, and its singular convenience lay in the double entrances, the fact that the departing *declassés* could easily mingle with the thousand customers of the bazaar, and the passers by! For, every one in Petersburg uses the passage as a short cut. At the other end,—a crowded street, with three corners, and the canal, and also the Anitchikoff

Bridge, enabled 'the faithful to easily scatter at once!' A simple bell signal, from each end, gave instantly an absolute warning of any threatened descent or sudden danger! The crowd of trucks, drays, and wagons crowded around the Bazaar always provided a chattering throng of peasants into which the suspects could plunge with only a few steps, and then, be lost forever to individual pursuit!

"Hundreds of people lived then, as now, in the Bazaar, behind the double line of these little shops, and in the long galleries above, with restaurant, and theater, at the two street facades. Vast crowds are always moving along there. So, though near the very Police Headquarters, at any hour of the day or night, people with bundles or in any kind of guise were not suspected! It gave a ready temporary haven to this band of madmen, a rallying place, and a haunt for the exchange of correspondence between the incoming and outgoing messengers of the dark cause. Some deadly work in conspiracy was probably effected there! The greatest danger to Hermione, in her short stay, consisted in her marked beauty and the distinction of her appearance, which lifted her so far above all possible bazaar surroundings! I am told also, that many of the forty thousand government employés of our capital knew the secret of the hidden tunnel,—and, it is also suspected that the government police telegraph wires were often tapped by a flexible ground wire leading in there!"

"I don't see how that is possible, Serge!" was my astonished rejoinder. The Captain smiled!

"Can't you see that a government telegraphist would only have to go one block to give away the details of any new official cipher,—or even to work the key himself for an hour! It is in the seduction of these trusted higher technical employés of the government that the spirited young women conspirators find an easy and agreeable occupation. For, lawless love always seems to go hand in hand, with this queer, shapeless mental unrest, the growing cloud of political agitation which overhangs us all!"

"I have remarked," I said dryly, "that women often

abandon decency when they hurl themselves to the front!"

I remained gloomily silent! For Dimitri Trepoff was the trusted confidant of the Grand Duke Michael. And was Hermione only using his chivalric nature for a purpose? Was she a snare, a lovely snare set on only to seduce him to his ruin? I was ready to carry my misgivings away into the darkness of the night. For who can tell what a woman's present is, what her past, her secret past has been, or whither she will whirl off—when once freed?

"It hardly seems possible that those people secretly executed that toilsome work! All the heavy excavation!" I was amazed at their resolution.

Zastrow's brow grew clouded. "Everything is possible to zeal and self-devotion!" he said. "Some of the earth may have been secretly carted away in the heavy cases supposed to contain English, German, and French goods! That plan would only need the aid of a few friendly teamsters! And, these people have been secretly laboring here on the Neva for twelve to fifteen years! They were not watched at first."

"Yes! It is possible, I see now," I assented, for I remembered the four months' work under the walls of Libby Prison, in Richmond, Virginia, where a few captive Union officers persevered until, with tin plates, table knives, and tin coffee cups, they dug the long tunnel, which saved fifty officers from a horrible captivity! And, these people in the bazaar evidently had ample command of tools, untiring numbers to work and also friends without to help them! "As you say—it was easily dug before they were run so hard by the police!"

"It seems, though, so strange to me, that all these various things can be done here without the knowledge of the police,—and the government agents!" This was my own final comment! It was a "case of conscience!"

"True!" said Zastrow, as the General's summons to piquet took him away from me. "But, these members of a dangerous clan have keen brains,—and a long experience! They have unnumbered friends among the smaller government officials,—and, in the varied public services!

They work, plot, and toil, with patience, skill, and aided by the desperate self-devotion of fanaticism! Free to vary their plans, they can adapt their own schemes to use all the friends available, and then also take advantage of all the spread out lines of one vast official mechanism! No! It is not so surprising! It only astonishes me they do not oftener succeed."

"You are right, Serge!" I remarked,—as I clasped his hand, "and I hope that we,—too,—will succeed in our innocent battle!" I was thinking of the beautiful waif of Fortune who had won our hearts, and—had enslaved Trepoff forever.

"For her life," he whispered, as I went out, and prepared to sally forth alone on my expedition of business and pleasure!

The night wind cut me keenly, as I held my cape twisted around my neck and shoulders, and slowly worked my way down to the line of carriages at the Place Razvodni. I sought a man who could understand me! My first practical difficulty! I was surely a crippled Don Juan!

A long colloquy with several sleigh drivers busied me before I could finally make my destination known! I envied the varied new arrivals their easy command of the Muscovite tongue, as they all drove away in triumph! At last, I was bundled up into a carriage, for my loudly vociferated cries, "Winter Garden," had at last attracted a Jehu who recognized my desires! As the vehicle twisted slowly around, I saw a strangely familiar womanly form regarding me on the corner.

"Who can that be?" I queried. "My circle is not so extensive. That person I do know. And, who would be out,—alone,—in this gloomy night!" I was so eager and excited that I soon forgot this chance rencontre, as I dashed away to meet the sewing woman! On the kindly Durand I now depended entirely to outwit all the espionage which might follow that mysterious abstraction of my letters, which I had not dared to promptly reveal, to my fellows in interest! And now I feared to tell them the story!

I felt for my letters! Not only were they safe in my right side pocket, but the other one was tenanted by sev-

eral unfamiliar papers and documents which seemed not to be my own property! I was somewhat astonished! I remembered none such. In the dim light of the stars I fingered all my own letters! Yes! They were all there, three carefully prepared envelopes! And then I vainly endeavored to recognize the character of the handful of papers extracted from the left capacious pocket of my cotton-wadded, fur-lined cape cloak! How did they come to be there? What was their meaning! I began to have a dim suspicion of trouble.

I was uneasy! The incident was a very strange one! And,—with a peculiar feeling of self-protection,—I placed them all, with the utmost care, in the inner breast-pocket of my warm English reefer!

“I will consult at once with Durand upon this whole mysterious affair!” I muttered, “for papers do not grow, even in St. Petersburg!”

With a devil-may-care air of rakishness,—not acquired on the Schuykill, I then tossed my driver a liberal fare, and joined the merry throng in the well lit up Winter Garden! I circled rakishly around the brilliantly lit exterior,—and, quietly cast furtive glances around! It was flattering to me, as a possible Romeo, that my manly graces elicited at once several merry challenges to a turn of a particularly seductive Strauss waltz! Reflecting that I was the promised property of the Durand, “for this night only.”—I declined the hints somewhat regretfully, in one or two special cases! For, chivalry here demanded the little supper,—and the dalliance over silver-necked bottles! The flesh was willing! Alas! I had not the time! Hence, I could not! I softly sighed, in unconscious slang, “Not this evening! Some other evening!” and then, to save future heartaches, I sought safety in Durand’s restaurant! It was truly here a palace of Phryne,—this more than jolly Vanity Fair! My exit saved my cherished “first principles!”

As I cast back one fleeting glance,—a tender one,—at the merry temptresses, I again saw, in the thread of the gay crowd, that familiar woman form I had seen on the Place Razvodni. It showed me a graceful stride,—a willowy beauty,—which, hidden in dark walking robes,

I did not recognize. And the face was veiled! My manly heart leaped up in pride! Was I a favored one? "Can I have made a local conquest?" I thought of Dimitri Trepoff's rapidly growing renown, and smiled in curious pride! "Anch' io son pittore! There are as good men as he,—in the world!" I mused.

But, I soon forgot all this flattering pursuit, as I carefully locked the door where I was ushered in. I was conducted to where the vivacious French woman had a very neat little supper—all ready, in a retired room! I was already sly Russian enough to greet her calmly, and then to busy myself in getting out of my multifarious wraps! I waited for her own report,—and also to know if we were perfectly safe! The quick witted seamstress understood me at once.

"We are perfectly safe here," she smiled, "unless we should be very suddenly seized! I think even then that only your reputation would suffer if you were found,—in such close quarters. For, I am still a woman!"

I grimly smiled, "I am not half as particular about my moral character as I was, before I came to your beloved Russia! Now, Madame," I remarked seriously, "I only am anxious to save my own neck! My local social reputation is a matter of indifference! If hard things are said of me,—on the Neva,—I will return the compliment generally,—when I cast my eyes on the Schuylkill once more. So it will be what we Americans call a 'stand off.'"

Marie Durand laughed. "You would make a very poor conspirator! Call me 'Marie' always after this! The 'Madame' is too affected! But," she became suddenly serious, "tell me,—is all well with you on the Admiralty quai?"

I nodded, and returned to the charge, Yankee like.

"And, with you?" She bowed her head.

"So far all is well! Our friends have to this time escaped the drag nets thrown out, after the discovery of the deserted tunnel! But—nearly every open establishment where suspicion could attach in Petersburg has been visited this week. The absence of one or two of our own sewing girls in the Winter Palace, at work, enabled me



to count in all right, when the *séjour* papers were especially examined at our shop! My occupation of 'figure model' enabled them to drape me very thoroughly,—in borrowed magnificence,—and so I passed as an 'ingenue.'"

The trim Frenchwoman twirled on her heels, with a dainty swing. "I have yet a bit of figure!" she coquetishly remarked. "So I am accounted for, and temporarily safe! But, our own watchers report to me that General Haxo,—Colonel Luboff, and that cavalry general who rides around always, now, with Huxo—have been busied separately or jointly, dogging after Dimitri Trepoff. It seems so strange! Of course," sighed Marie, "they know Major Trepoff is not a blind fool, and that he would finally find out about the secret domiciliary visit to his rooms! He is too Russian at heart to have anything politically compromising in his rooms. As for any hunt for papers and suspicious documents—it would be merely ridiculous in his case! The family is 'Loyal en tout.' As to his private amours, nobody cares,—moreover they are so easily conducted here, at first hands, that letters are absolutely unnecessary. Open arms await him in many places. Major Trepoff's only mistake was in harboring Hermione at all in his own rooms! For we all know only a stranger would go to such needless trouble here to be the sharer of a common indiscretion. 'Occasion waits only on opportunity' here. Hence, they must feel that, if he has had the beautiful unknown once under his spell, that he must still meet her secretly,—outside the pale of society. Every open place of resort is at their command. Therefore,—they shadow his every movement to trap Hermione! Captain Zastrow has saved her life,—and perhaps saved us all, by setting the Major up as a lady-killer. They may be led to think she was the woman who fled from the Palace—this little artistic star, who is now the talk of the town!" Marie laughed heartily.

We were enjoying a nice little supper in a free campaign way, and I greatly admired the cheery, resolute woman, who seemed to have become perfectly used to living under the ban!

"Then you think that we are all safe for the present?" I queried.

"Yes!" Marie said thoughtfully. "Simple watchfulness is your defensive armor now! Neither General Haxo, nor Colonel Ivan Luboff dare push themselves uninvited upon the society of the dignified Komaroff ladies! And, as to my poor friend Hermione,—nothing would justify any intrusion in such a household! General Zastrow is a Nestor of the nobility, as well as a monument of unchallenged loyalty! Unless your little circle is compromised by some frightful imprudence of your own—then, when the Komaroffs go back to Warsaw, you and Hermione should easily glide along out of all danger! Thirty-four hours only, then, will make life seem a heaven on earth to you! Of course, if Hermione had been unhappily seized in the tunnel, some of our faithful friends would have also shared her dark fate! But we are sworn to revenge them all—life for life! The law of Moses!" Her face was livid.

"Now,—thank God," cried Marie Durand,—"she has nothing whatever compromising about her! Simple fear will keep her own lips closed, and she alone would suffer, if arrested! The order is safe—for she would die mutely! Even you are safe, although you might be closely interrogated. You are innocent. You have never handled or presented her false passport! You can simply say that it disappeared. As for your supposed relation,—mere gallantry would excuse that. Neither Trepoff, nor Zastrow, too, could not be proved to have forged the visas and police frontier endorsements,—and,—it is now almost impossible for any outside attack to be made on the Zastrow household! Only some one who has absolutely recognized Hermione would dare to denounce her! There is no such dangerous person here!—She never has been in Petersburg! It would seem that we are impreguably fortified!"

"And her real rank and name?" I was very eager, as I leaned forward. The trim French woman shrugged her plump and pretty shoulders!

"Ah!" smiled Marie, "I could not tell you, even if I would! I only know that it is far above all reproach! It

was a self-immolation for her to have voluntarily come here! I imagine that the very fact of her being so far above all the clouds led her to be selected for the one great trust, this most desperate quest! If you can save her now," she gravely said, "then according to our own unbroken rule, she is forever freed from a call to any second act of personal self-devotion, or even a selection by lot! Now," said Marie, cheerfully, as she trifled with a bit of nougât, and sipped her petit burgundy,—“as both of the young officers are fairly safe, and Hermione is now trebly guarded,—you are the only weak point of our chain. For, if taken up, you are powerless to understand the happenings around. And, as you have been either under Saratoff's watchful care,—or else guarded by the hospitable doors of the old mansion, you should escape any question.”

With a sudden inspiration,—I then drew out the mysterious papers I had found in my overcoat pocket. “Listen!” I said gravely, “a strange thing happened on my way here!—I had prepared four envelopes with some letters signed only in private marking, to be simply sent out by your friends to my Paris bankers! They are merely private business matters. I counted on you to have some one of your daily departing friends properly stamp them when over the frontier, and mail them at any town in Germany! In fact, I have brought a fifty-rouble note to cover that bit of personal service as a jog to the memory. Here they are!”

And I then laid down the four letters and the fifty-rouble note! “I can send these out to-morrow!” brightly cried Marie. “The head cook of the French Ambassador here goes on to Paris to select the needed gastronomic supplies for those winter dinners,—which in Lent always supply the place of gayer festivities! He is one of us,—and a devoted friend of mine,—and,” she smiled. “I will answer for his fidelity with my life! He is covered from all personal search,—by the ‘lassez passer’ ticket, which is given to all high class legation servants. You see we use the Czar's own authorization for our mails. So you need not fear for them! Is that your only dilem-

ma?" she continued, as she thrust the four letters into a pocket in her dress bosom.

I fixed my eyes on her, gravely.

"Now, that done—it brings up the first strange occurrence of my whole stay at the Zastrows!" I then related my lingering at the cab stand at Place Razvodni! I also described the strange way in which the loose papers had been found in my pocket,—and, I laid them down upon the table before her!

"As they are all in Russian,"—I observe,—“the thing is rather mysterious, for people do not go around and thrust advertisements into a man's pockets at night!"

I ceased abruptly,—for Marie Durand was transfixed! She was gazing at the half-dozen flimsy papers with a look of speechless horror! Her fingers trembled as she ran them over! Ah! My forebodings! It meant trouble! "Quickly examine all your clothes and other pockets,—while I am away," she whispered. "See that you have nothing else on your person that does not belong to you." She slipped silently out of a little side door, and in a few moments returned with a glowing face!

"They are all now crackling in the great kitchen fire!" She sank back helpless into a chair.

"What does it mean?" I cried.

"It is astounding!" she gasped. "I hardly know what to do! For even here, we might be seized if the doors were quickly burst in. We may be trapped here. Let me think!" She was quivering in an agony of unmistakable fear, and still I was in the dark.

"They were—" I began. "Enough to bring you before a summary court martial, if arrested, with them on your person! And, the trick,—clumsy as it may seem,—would indicate that you are to be followed, and arrested to-night! There is treachery somewhere, around us! It was intended they should be surely found upon you,—and,—why you have not been molested yet I know not! Let me think! Let me think! Did they hope to find Hermione with you?"

I paced the room wistfully eyeing each flimsy door in the momentary expectation of seeing a dozen fierce police agents rush in. Ah! How I longed, then, for the "sweet

security of the familiar paths by the Schuykill! I was "fatigued with Empire"—the great Russian Empire.

"I have it," Marie Durand slowly faltered, controlling a growing agitation. "You now are clearly suspected! You have been surely followed here. It was thought that you would meet some one of importance to apprehend. To incriminate that unknown person, and also yourself, this vile trick has been attempted in order to bring you fairly before the police, in a most questionable manner! It would certainly demand all the efforts of the American Legation,—and all your loyal friends to explain this,—to free you,—and to convince the higher local authorities of your absolute inutility to the reactionary people of any continental land! Your ignorance of the local topography and the continental languages would make it only a madness to use a man like you as a secret agent. But, it would be a matter of vexatious delay, and, perhaps lead to Hermione's capture."

"See here! Marie!" I cried,—with the return of one last flickering hope, "can it not be that Haxo and Luboff only hope to detain me here in order to gain time to push an acquaintance with the beauty who poses here as my sister? It might bring her, then, helpless within the reach of their own low arts! They may judge all women by the easy-going sirens who prey on military circles everywhere! There is no limit to the vanity of the pampered military beaux of Europe."

"No!" she answered. "In that case, they would try and at once implicate her,—try to betray her and so get her over to the lonely fortress, or into the terrible secret rooms of the Vassili-Ostrov! There she would be helpless under their vile arts,—like many more poor victims have been,—like many,—too many,—alas, will be! No! This was done only to quickly drag you, and the woman found to-night with you,—before the nearest correctional tribunal! The first thing, of course, would be an exhaustive search,—and—thus, they hoped to be able to fathom the story of all your past in St. Petersburg, or ruin your future, being taught from these documents and the papers found on you! Or, they may have hoped to implicate you further by finding you with some sus-

picious reactionary woman! For," she smiled, with a truly French insinuation, "no sane man would be supposed to come here only to meet another man! This is the very bower of Venus! Chilled, perhaps, but very much alive! Only a 'woman appointment' would be your justification in venturing here alone,—even though a curious stranger!"

"What remains for us to do? Tell me the first steps!" I most anxiously demanded. "For I shall not go out of the mansion again save in one of the family equipages,—or under the sure social escort of some member of the family! I have lost my nerve!"

"That is a prudent decision!" Marie mused. "And, you have really seen nothing? You have not been followed? Or, interfered with at all—so far?" She gazed steadily into my eyes. I dared not then tell her all my fears,—of passing the sly governess—of the Lubow colloquy,—of my lost private letters! For, I was most deeply concerned now to have my four envelopes sent safely on to Paris! Their contents veiled in the semi-safety of their careful preparation would effect all my purposes in writing. When she was satisfied with her scrutiny, Marie Durand was ready with her present orders.

"Now! You and I must be careful to leave this garden separately! You had better go out first. I, then, will wait, and leave by the open entrance,—on foot! You can take the first sleigh or carriage!—I will see that a trusty waiter escorts you out, and, gets you a reliable driver! But, first go out and circulate alone around the garden a little! Linger here and there with the women dancers! They all speak French! Be on your guard about robbery—and, quietly observe if you are followed! Note any particular person who seems to turn up from time to time mysteriously! I will hide myself, while you are out, in another room here,—a dark servants' room! Come back into the open wine room, when you are tired,—and, I will have my own waiter on watch there. Follow him quietly out, and he will bring you at once to me! You are safe with any of those dancing women! They all are registered people, and they value their heads and their harvest making here entirely too much to 'play at poli-

tics.' " In five minutes I was apparently only a gay loiterer in the giddy throng of pleasure seekers. But, my proud heart failed me. My wraps and outer coverings were all in charge of the waiter, whose secret charge I had become. "They can not stuff my pockets!" I exulted. I thrust my hands in them à l'Anglais. A first tour of the hall showed me nothing, and I returned, slowly, to a table near the open entrance of the wine hall. Beauty had lost its charms! I wooed Bacchus. Dallying over a glass of vermouth, I gazed keenly upon the shifting, passing groups. A few kaleidoscopic twists of the dancing throng showed me there, near me, again, the hovering, veiled woman, whose sudden rencontre at the Place Razvodni had excited my suspicions. "I am followed! By Jove! I'll make sure!" I decided in desperation. Sauntering through the crowd, a dozen turns convinced me of the truth of my fears, and, also, that the hovering woman was young, was thickly veiled, and was very graceful of carriage. This was all I could discern, for when I doubled and twisted on my track, and sought by apparent hazard to quickly approach her, she smartly eluded me, and, yet, from a distance was ever lingering there in the radius of my vision. Alone, in the city which was now full of all possible terrors to me, I was at last convinced that I must run the official gauntlet. I became totally desperate in my sudden panic. "I will get back at once to the Zastrow mansion, and, then, by heavens, I will not leave it again!" This was my firm decision. I had already satisfied myself that Marie Durand had burned the important note I had safely delivered to her from "my sister" Hermione. "Let the blow fall now when it may, I will be found under the protection of the laws of hospitality. There will be others to watch over me when I go out again." My social ardor had visibly cooled, and I gave up the vain hopes of shining as a Petersburg Don Juan. My Romeo smile had vanished. When I was covered by the break up of a wild dance measure, I bolted hastily into the booth of Durand, and then seated myself back in the farthest angle, out of sight, but where I could have the range of the door. I was chilled in my blood with the long waiting, the un-

usually late hours, and my new nervous fear, and visibly I astonished the waiter by the draught of cognac I swallowed before he led me to Marie Durand's haunt. It was a square American "horn." She awaited me there with a breathless concern. "You may as well take it easily," she said, after a few moments spent in brooding over my news. This pursuer is some one evidently who knows you well, and has also been set on to watch you. It is no trifle. No love fancy. So you can only drive to your home without concealment. It is the best course. Go out openly in innocence," she smiled. "Only in the future remain hidden under that roof's friendly shelter. I can always easily communicate with Trepoff and Zastrow, and I will also have one of our women, a sister of the new faith, bear my daily communications to Hermione. Under the pretense of a little necessity of the dressmaking art, that will be a complete covered way. Ladies are always—like modern cruisers, in the need of 'repairs.'"

"Can I do anything for you, Marie?" I queried, as I felt a strongly growing desire to be at once on my way to the shelter of the Zastrow home. "Nothing!" said the anxious woman. "I shall see you very soon, for I will visit Hermione on our own secret matter in my trade capacity. And, as you are her brother, when I come to her rooms, you can easily enter there, and, I can then inform you of the safe delivery of your Paris letters. So, you will not need to compromise yourself by future visits to me," she laughed.

It occurred to me then that I had not mentioned the coming opera party. Marie Durand quickly sprang up when I told her and pressed her hands upon her heaving bosom. "There is the one unavoidable danger I have feared. It would never, never do to absolutely refuse Madame Komaroff. Hermione has exhausted the 'sudden illness' pretext. It will not do to maintain that weak subterfuge. Nature will not lie! All Petersburg, too, will be there. A gala night. And if any one is on the Neva who knows her it will be a frightful risk to run. But, by seating herself with care, and being socially shadowed by the high rank of the Komaroffs, with some little toilet mystifications in which I can help, she can



perhaps be safer there than alone at the mansion. For, such men as General Haxo and Colonel Luboff dare not visit in the opera boxes as a social custom. Their trade is too unpopular. They are shunned."

"Why so?" I innocently asked. "Because," she replied dryly, "their presence suggests a too close friendship with the police. There are crowds of society women spies here in government pay. So, you see, the gold lace on a policeman general does not hide the cold facts that he is feared and shunned. That still after all his rank he is everywhere an unwelcome guest.

"And, also, a menace to any hope of free social enjoyment. I despise these bulldogs!" she hissed. She rose, then, quietly and quickly bade me "God speed" on my homeward way. "Do not forget all my injunctions. Should you be questioned or arrested, simply say nothing. Fear nothing. You, as a foreigner, would only be taken to a detention station, where all the superior officers speak French, and, your visiting card, with a bold demand for your own ambassador, will soon bring your friends to you. In all that may happen, simply say nothing. Avoid in future all strangers, all mixed crowds, and all chance conveyances. Also, all strange goddesses! You must not leave the Zastrow house on foot or alone again."

"And you?" I asked, with a real concern for the poor, brave woman. "I shall leave to-night on foot by the great entrance which is used by the commoner orders. When a safe distance away I will then take two different sleighs to reach by stages my own chosen shelter. For we wanderers have always one or two ready places where we avail ourselves of private passages through the squares. Trust to me for the safe delivery of your letters. They are absolutely safe. And, as you have been followed here from General Zastrow's, watch all the dwellers in that house. Some one of the house servants may have yielded to Luboff's ready bribes. And the very one you trust the most be spying upon you all. Nothing is safe here, in this hateful Petersburg." Her voice had a mournful ring, as I saw her vanish, and I silently grasped my cloak, following the waiter out to

the grand entrance, where the sleighs and carriages were being filled with the departing. As I hastily slipped a ten rouble note into the man's hand I glanced around as my driver tried to struggle out of the tangle of the departing teams. A sudden chill shook my nerves as, near to me in the score of people then pressing out of the garden, I saw again that agile woman shadowing me, still heavily veiled and wrapped in a dark shuba. A few quick whispered directions to the waiter who was bowing his thanksgave my driver the unusual orders to go all around the Winter Garden, and to take me homeward on the smaller darkest streets. "I may thus throw her off the track!" I defiantly thought.

And so, I strained my eyes to watch as we swept around three sides of the great palace of pleasure. A surprise awaited me which took away my last vestige of hope.

For, in a crowd of a half dozen burly police agents, with a fringe of loungers and servants looking timidly on, in the full glare of the lamps of the private entrance, I saw my own careful guardian of this unhappy evening—poor Marie Durand—her face pale and with frightened eyes, being pushed roughly into a waiting covered carriage. There was an ominous silence as the passers by paused, dumb in astonishment, at such a public seizure. As I swept by I could see that they all scattered in evident fear at the descent of the police upon the lonely woman. The lightning might strike again!

The cold, cruel stars gleamed unpitifully down on me, as I was whirled away toward the house where my sleep was now shadowed by the most horrible dreams foreboding the unknown terrors of the future. I had lost the American habit of peaceful slumber, and I longed for Philadelphia's nepenthe of burgherlike ease. I longed for the Quaker city. It was half-past eleven when I swept down along the lonely Admiralty Quay. I made one Russian driver's heart madly rejoice as I hastily handed him the first bill I could reach in my purse. And when the welcome door clanged upon me I gazed at the surprised butler with a vaguely frightened air as he aided me to remove my wraps. "My God! I remember now! She

had my letters with her!" I groaned, in a positive fright, and I grimly remembered the particularities of the usual police search which the poor woman had so graphically described. And she was now on the rack. The sound of laughing voices came ringing out merrily from the great salons all still lit up as I sought my rooms for a few moments rest to compose myself. I dared not enter the drawing rooms in my agitation, and yet, with the news of the seizure of the one faithful ally to whom we all owed so much I must act at once. What could I do? I was puzzled.

"Serge must know this immediately. And Hermione must also be promptly warned at once—to-night." I walked my rooms in a maze of doubt. I was timorous, even there, in my rooms. I knew the Russian custom of stealing from the night what the dark days always robbed us of, would detain the guests for some time below. A supper at twelve was a daily feature of the hospitable house wherein feasting never seemed to end. The chief end of the old Russian is much eating and drinking.

"I will not risk going to Hermione's rooms. I will call her aside, and if she can then steal away for a few moments I can warn her, so that we may all be on our guard," so I mused. I had quickly rearranged my toilet, and, opening the door quietly, I stepped down the dimly lighted hall. As I descended the grand stairway I passed a swiftly gliding figure. I had hardly the time to recognize Mademoiselle Dauvray, who entered her own rooms next to the apartments of the pretty charge. The snap of a lock resounded on my ears. Rather a late visit to a jeweler; or a tryst of love! Zastrow's much desired rival! Had he materialized? I hoped so.

Her dark dress and hasty disappearance proved to me that she had not presided at the piano in the evening as usual.

"I wonder if an external intrigue has really supplanted the vain worship of the dashing captain, Serge Zastrow?" was my last query, as I entered the grand salon, with the air of a returning reveler. My lightness of manner bordered on the hysterical, and, moreover, I was not re-

assured when, leaving the lively circle, Serge Zastrow drew me into a corner.

"Look here, Grahame!" he whispered, "I hope that you are not foolish enough to flirt with that good-looking French devil, *Félice*. She would be a very dangerous acquaintance for a man of your staid habits. She is a little too rapid, even for such a devil of a fellow as you."

"What do you mean?" I muttered, as I had caught *Hermione's* eye, and tried to arouse her attention to my desire to speak with her alone. The sister of my Russian adoption had risen and approached smiling.

"Why, she has been out all the evening, and only returned a few moments after you went upstairs." I was dumb with a new fear, for now I knew that Colonel *Luboff's* friend was a spy, and my secret foe.



## BOOK II.—IN THE BEAR'S DEN

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### CHAPTER VI.

#### DIGGING THE MINE—A TARTAR'S TRICKS!

Hermione read the message of my eyes. 'An important report.

We all said "Good-night" with concealed eagerness. Serge and the pretty little Countess Komaroff were at the piano. "*Ca marchait toujours!*"

Her mother, the hostess, General Zastrow, and Trepoff had made a gay party at *écarté*, and a happier circle did not exist in all Russia.

Laughing raillery pursued us as to my flirtations. I was glad enough to escape this merry mockery. For every nerve thrilled now with fear. The cloud would burst soon.

Once in our rooms I told my story with heavy heart.

The letters to my real sister and my clients would surely betray me. And our faithful ally, Marie Durand, was now under the bear's paw. I found how flimsy our paper precautions were under the grip of the police.

Hermione was speechless. This last blow was too much. I asked if anything unusual had occurred at the mansion.

"Nothing, only Mademoiselle Dauvray was out a long while, an unusually long while, for an unprotected young lady." Then she had tracked me. My presence at the Garden was reported to her by the police. That was the trick—the foul snare. She had evidently driven there direct, watched me, and then ordered the arrest of the woman. But, for what purpose—and why? I had never wronged her. I was not a lost lover.

Such was my belief. The desire to complicate me, and to arrest my messenger could only come from a closely

interested observer, backed by a higher power. Some one lurked behind her. Luboff or Haxo? Which devil was at work?

A tap at the door. We started like guilty thieves. All our nerves were beginning to be shaky in the extreme. The maid entered with a tea service. Hermione looked up languidly. In gracefully taking the cups and pouring out the national beverage, the beauty started, as a little paper fell fluttering to the floor. I grasped it eagerly, and crushed it in my hand, and turned to speak.

But the girl was gone already. More mystery. What was this? A new trap? No; it was a friendly message. For Hermione looked at it with a sigh of relief and then handed it to me. I was still in the dark, for the little scrap of paper showed to me only some figures in an apparent confusion. The Secret Order. "Our friends can reach us, you see, even here," said my companion, smiling. Evidently, Durand had a faithful confederate in the Zastrow household—among the servants. They were, perhaps, aiding us secretly and watching then the sneaking spy, the French governess. I remembered Durand's story of how the doomed paid back their debts of hatred, and demanded life for life. So, the Dauvray played in dangers herself unknown. "Listen," said Hermione, with evident agitation. "Durand was arrested on the flimsiest pretext as being a 'wandering character.' They took her to a private detention station. She was sternly questioned, then searched, all papers taken from her, and then she was simply told to report in the morning. A kind of guarded parole. If no improper matter was found, if her papers are innocent in their nature, she will be able to reclaim them very easily. She will report to us secretly further to-morrow, and bids us not to seek to aid her—above all to keep quiet and not approach her.

"Trepoff must not try to see her personally. For the two linked once together our whole secret would gradually unravel itself."

"Will she get in serious trouble?" said I, with some concern. "Did they discover her real name and status?" I was filled with terrors of my own now.

"No," replied Hermione, "Durand is not her supposed

name (as you might well know). She has regular papers now, and a room, with this perfectly natural occupation as modiste and seamstress stated on those useful fresh documents. They will shadow her perhaps still to catch us. There is a long arm, a keen brain, a cruel heart, somewhere behind all these attempts on our party."

"She never keeps any documents in her room, or on her person. I mean the—the—secret ones," concluded Hermione. A very wise precaution it seemed to me, for it would only be carrying around a portable "sudden death." I thought only of myself.

"And my lost letters." As they were not stamped the police can't hold her for stealing them or defrauding the mail. This was my own burning question and I dared not confess my rashness.

"And will they return the letters and papers she may have had on her person?" I asked, with a quaking heart. Hermione looked surprised. "Certainly they will, after copying them," rejoined my companion, very coolly. "The police always copy anything they choose to open. It is a public right here."

We separated gloomily. I to toss on my pillow and to feel that I would be, at least, detected in a shameless social imposture. And that, after all, much slyness and useless heroism might go to the wall at last.

Hermione's only chance of safety was in her entire passivity in all future secret society matters. She had frankly avowed that all her work was done and a safe departure her only aim. I fell asleep dreaming that I wandered, heavily laden and weary, on a lonely, wintry road, seeking the welcome guide post marked "The Way Out." While quiet reigned over the old ancestral mansion, and all weary cares were forgotten in sleep, in a great room at the Prefecture of Police, a stern-faced man sat carefully looking over copies of the intercepted letters which poor Durand's bosom had yielded up to the rough hand of a peasant woman attendant. My secrets!

Calmly enjoying his cigar, he made a note or two, and gazed, now and then, at Colonel Ivan Luboff, the grim sub-chief, who sat moody and silent, eyeing his superior. He would have roughly made a brutal finish of the job



long before. For he had discerned much of the truth. The Bureau was but a few squares from the Admiralty Quai, where the netted birds slumbered. This spider's den was plainly furnished, but with all modern Russian conveniences. A telegraph operator sat there ready to touch the magic button at a single nod from the chief.

On the long table, among great piles of other seized papers, lay the original of the copied letters, with a report of the arresting officer, and a few notes from the governor's spy. For, Félise Dauvray's trail ended here where gold was to be had easily and revenge thrown in, gratis.

On the other side of the desk, a bearded secretary waited to note the coming orders of the chief. For it was the redoubtable General Haxo himself who read the lines with unmoved features. Luboff, summoned specially from his club, intently watched his silent superior. His own tenure of a comfortable billet and high rank was the favor of this heavy-jawed, gray-eyed Sphinx, who devoured the lines in a cool, professional consideration.

The ticking of the office clock, and the movement of some one of the dozen or more inspectors in the ante-room was the only sound.

Haxo, plainly dressed in dark clothes, was booted and spurred. A belt and heavy cavalry saber lay with his cap and cloak near. A half-open drawer at his elbow showed also a couple of grim-looking revolvers handy to the grasp. Some very strange little tableaux had called for the use of these "implements" in the dark past.

Evidently not to be caught napping was the alert General Haxo. "Write," said he, in a sharp, steady voice. He ordered as follows: "In the case of the woman arrested at the Winter Garden to-night:

"These letters will be returned.

"The woman to be allowed to depart.

"She is not to be further molested or frightened.

"Let her rooms, however, be carefully watched. No blunders. Find out her associates.

"Further report to me in person. No overt acts until my own order."

Tossing the letters to the secretary, the chief said then to his underlings, "Leave us."

The secretary and operator withdrew to the ante-room. Silence reigned. "Colonel Luboff," began the general, as he comfortably lit a cigar, and mused for a moment. The fate of several human beings was in the balance.

The officer sprang to his feet as if electrified. The vulture was ready to swoop down now.

"Sit down and make notes. There will be no further papers filed in this case. Report yourself detached. Telegraph to the Civil Police Bureau to that effect. You will act only under my private orders." (He paused in thought.)

"Send all these telegrams. Go to the frontier when you get replies from Paris. Report to me then by telegraph here the arrival of the coming lady at Eydkunen. Come on the train with her. Telegraph me from Wilna. You will find orders awaiting you at the station when you return here.

"Let the lady be treated with every courtesy. She is of the highest social respectability. Do not forget that a moment," he leered viciously.

"Make her acquaintance. Read over these copies and reports.

"Don't give her any hint of previous meeting with her brother. "Send in full from Wilna her general conversation and all new facts."

The chief paused. Luboff had finished all his official notes. Haxo passed him the papers. "Is that all?" asked the Colonel. "Yes, you can go now, but leave all these, when you have done your work, with my private secretary. Send the dispatches at once. I think I have covered the whole ground," he said. "Direct all the answers to be duplicated to me here, immediately. You have the Privy Council authority in this matter. Order all letters to these people or from them to be copied and the copies sent to me here. Let the originals be delivered as addressed, with no special delay. I want them to fancy they correspond freely," he smiled. "The whole family. Have you understood fully all my orders?" concluded the military policeman.

The Colonel saluted and bowed his affirmative.

"Remember, now, act with the utmost caution. This affair is for me alone," and the voice rang like steel in its frosty coldness. But, a warm glow stole over his heart, for he fancied he could see a pair of eyes pleading to him, beyond the tide.

"Report yourself on your departure here," was the last injunction, as the General rose, threw his cloak on, buckled on his saber, and took his cap. A cruel smile wreathed his lips. For she, the beautiful unknown, was drifting into his nets—and then—then—a rosy flush tinged his cheeks.

Selecting a fresh cigar, he rang his bell sharply. The secretary appeared. Haxo spoke in a reverie of coming triumphs, for a sweet surrender might soften certain official severities. "Remain till Colonel Luboff has finished. Call on the operator." The chief nodded carelessly to Luboff and stalked out.

Robust in form, sinewy and alert, in the vigor of middle age, with a soldierly bearing, the General was a type of official energy and decision. But, it was the voluptuary whose heart bounded now in the certainty of a final triumph. His plans were neatly laid. His cropped hair, thin, wiry moustache, and impassive face, spoke of the trained soldier. The cruel lips and cold, steady eye belonged to the relentless Tartar. "Wait till she is under my hand," he mused. "She shall learn how to plead—to plead to me."

Colonel Luboff called for the official cipher books. "I wonder what Haxo's real game is in this. He is going out of his way. Is the game worth the candle?" and the huge Colonel sighed.

The secretary produced the volumes from the safe and stood ready to work his master's will.

"Give me France," said he with business like alacrity, and wrote off a form. "Ivanhoff," he commanded (glancing toward the telegraph). The operator glided to his side.

"At once!" was the order. "Are the wires all open?" "Yes, your excellency." This man coldly played every day with the life and death of others. His own fate was

yet unshadowed. "Check back the delivery of each message," said the sub-chief to the secretary. "Send a special report to me at ———," and he whispered an address. The young clerk smiled knowingly. For Colonel Luboff had all a soldier's easy vices. He had a retreat of his own where his chief could not reach easily all his private life. So, they all played at catch-as-catch-can—only in varying hidden bowers, avoiding each other tacitly. No sound was heard save the clicking of the key as Ivanhoff bent over his instrument. His thin, bony fingers struck down like the fang of a cobra. Misery, death, heartbreak, ruin, were distilled daily from the octopus arms of the harmless looking wire. Shame and dishonor, a tyrant's hate and a despot's curse could be spread five thousand miles abroad by this pallid-faced man, who was now sowing dragons' teeth for Alexander Romanoff. The magic wire which talks was under his impressive sway. An executioner by electricity—a pioneer. The scratching of Luboff's pen kept time to the fatal music of the clicking key. Through the lonely room the ticking of the office clock added its dismal refrain, like the hollow tapping of coffin nails. It was like the drip, drip, drip of the rain from the eaves in a silent room where one watches the dead.

"One more! one more! one more!" it monotonously droned in the hush of the night. The very echoes of the room spoke of past agonies, and were prophetic of untold miseries lurking in the womb of Time.

The hangman may have a grim pride in his ghastly effectiveness; thief and burglar may recount with some little personal bravado their exploits; but even a Draco could hardly wish to submit for a world's candid opinion, the secret workings of that terrible "Inner Bureau"—a modern Golgotha. The stern grasp of the mailed hand in return for the lurking touches of the desperate conspirators.

And so, Luboff's brow was grave, as he concluded his own safety depended upon an exact compliance with the wishes of his chief. This cowardly web of lies might break one woman's heart, send another shrieking to the scaffold, and even involve helpless unresisting Innocence,

tried and venerable loyalty, in an abyss of shame and disgrace. But, Luboff had no choice but to go forward on the dark path laid out for him.

Still it was "*secundum artem*,"—their daily trade—and, yet this particular deal of the game seemed a bit cruel, even to an expert. For the official gamester played with marked cards. A vile deed!

The long arm of the Czar reaches out over the world. The laws of Russia are just. Under the guidance of his "bureaucracy" and hirelings, the fingers of royalty may unwittingly take on the stain of the cutthroat and pick-pocket. For, brutes in power will always twist severe codes to work out their own villainy.

For all these enormities, which the un pitying stars alone witness, concocted in fraud, executed with cowardly, murderous craft, are done in all lands, by the machinery of the law in the name of the state. The "*lettre de cachét*," the "arbitrary arrest," the Black Hole, the Bastille, the Piombi, the crypts of the Castle San Angelo, Bombay's dark dungeons, in all these the law turned the key on helpless humanity. This open disgrace rests on the detested "*tchinovik*" and police spy in Russia. Other lands have their own black records to face—the same stain. The indelible blood of innocence dyes the imperial ermine in the pages of history since first it became the uniform of autocracy. The shame lies far deeper than the work of the murderer's red hand. Behind the brute, in all the world's dark pages, see the tyrant sitting screened aloft. But, to business, the American cipher, the Russian interior code and the German signals followed in quick succession. For, General Haxo's orders must be obeyed. The net must be cast out. The steps all followed in a logical sequence of deviltry, and so the Colonel and his man toiled to make the way smooth for a new victim for Haxo. Here is Luboff's embodiment of the dark chief's brief mandates, and it seemed to "cover the case," as Luboff grimly smiled as the operator read off his official retained copies;

## No. 1. (Open Dispatch.)

Miss Madeleine Grahame,  
 Care Drexel, Harjes & Co.,  
 Bankers, Paris:

Come on here at once, your brother seriously ill at my house. Will meet you at station. Answer.

General Michael Zastrow,  
 Admiralty Quai,  
 St. Petersburg.

## No. 2.

Madame Justine Zastrow,  
 "Mon Plaisir,"  
 Via Kief:

Your sister arrives in a few days. Join us here. Will meet you at Tsarskoe Zeloe station. Telegraph your departure. Most important family business. Plans changed. Answer.

Walter Grahame,  
 Zastrow House,  
 Admiralty Quai.

## No. 3.

(Cipher.)

Count Baranoff, Russian Embassy,  
 Berlin:

Order Dimitri, the Greek, to report to "Luboff—Eydtkunen" by telegraph for orders at Berlin. Acknowledge.

Tolstoi,  
 By Haxo.

## No. 4.

(Cipher. Cable.)

Barthelèmy,  
 Russian Legation,  
 Washington:

Cable full particulars Madeleine Grahame, also Walter Grahame. Description. Passport Office, State De-

partment. Two passports issued together two years ago.  
Caution. Immediate. Acknowledge.

De Giers,  
By Haxo.

No. 5.

Secret Bureau,

Ministry Interior,

Correspondence Revision. Petersburg:

Send copies all correspondence family Zastrows, Cronstadt, Petersburg, Kief, also Walter Grahame, Madeleine Grahame, Petersburg and Paris. Forward all letters; no delay. File copies, secretary. Tolstoi,

Countersigned for Police Bureau, By Haxo.

Ivan Luboff.

It was long past the hour of midnight. Luboff's preparatory work was done, and the words of fell import were ticking off on the key, in harmless sounding clicks. Sitting moodily, he watched the flying fingers of the operator. Perhaps coming shadows touched him, for it was the hour when nerves weaken.

He touched a bell, an attendant appeared. He growled an order, and strode up and down gazing at the framed pictures of the Czar and Czarina.

In a few moments the man returned with a service. The tall colonel seized a flask of vodki and drained a huge dram. A cigar constituted his second course, as he watched the conclusion of the message transmission. The special work had quickly claimed its due precedence.

Every wire in Russia laid over its business for the "Police Bureau; only mobilization of the army ever took precedence of this dreaded office, and, even that, was delayed where the remotest affairs of the "imperial family" was directly concerned. And, all this Haxo conjuration was classed as "In the public interest, safety and security." Mere useful tidings could wait their time. Not daring to question his chief, it required no unusual experience for Luboff to read the whole story of this growing intrigue.

Something was decidedly wrong with "Miss Madeleine Grahame's status," or else the implacable General Haxo had "marked her down" in his own interest. The grim

colonel's brow was clouded. He had been touched and fascinated by her many graces. It was only a directly ominous hint from General Haxo which kept him away from the Zastrow mansion.

He received carelessly and unmoved the final report "finished" from Ivanoff, and then delivering the copies and telegram sheets to the secretary, he returned the cipher books. They were at once locked in the huge steel vaults of the private office. Ivan Luboff grasped cloak, cap and sword, as he drew a heavy sigh of relief, and ordered especial care as to instantly sending all the answers and reports to him. He then strode off without a parting word to the subordinates. His work was done. They could toil yet, into the wee sma' hours, creeping upward in a dangerous promotion. They finished their own midnight repast and soon the ticking of the clock and tramp of the weary sentinel's feet alone, woke the echoes of that Chamber of Horrors. All this villainy was executed "in the name of the law." Morning dawned on the great wintry city of Peter. The pale yellow borean sun struggled feebly through the mists and lit up the burnished copper domes and gaudy blue and gold pinacles of the hundred vacant temples. It glittered feebly on the soft crushed snow and touched here and there with its kindling flash the floating ice floes whirling now down the dark Neva. It would be a full month yet before the grip of the Winter King would choke that noble stream, and a strange new creation the queer "winter city" of wooden booths, with gaslight and streets, be laid out on the solid crystal floor. A carnival of tribal bazaar exchanges. A rude season of boorish merrymaking and wild license.

Then whole tribes of interior peasantry and indigenes would merrily traffic in furs, curios, and all their rude treasures, their spoils of the season's chase. Little shows, drinking booths and dance houses would afford amusement for the later night hours. A mad saturnalia of hardy lovers there, mingling to worship the god "Vodki." The whole working population of the capital mingles here in a barbaric "fair of all nations"—an unequaled character school—on the broad bosom of the Neva from



December to April 1st, yearly. The wildest members of fifty tribes meet in a mad license. A mob city is this.

Kurds, Laplanders, Asiatics, fierce Circassians, and trading Greeks, weird Armenians, subtle Persians, grave Turks, with criminals and desperate refugees of every class, swarm in this temporary town. The heavy armed police patrols simply confine the mad mob to their icy limits. The strong patrols of Cossacks watch all day, but when forced to serve at night they huddle, mounted on their hardy ponies, in groups of four, at the corners of the squares, left open on the ice for observation.

Revolver and saber on thigh, their lance points glitter with an ominous twinkle under the starlight. And they leave the local rule of the ice bazaars to the peasantry.

Only when a row over a gypsy girl's all too ready smiles, or some bitter race quarrel makes an unusual outcry do they swoop fiercely down and indiscriminately cow the crowds of despised foot travelers into a sudden submission. They do this with liberal use of their sharp lance points or careless blows with the flat of their sabers. There is a ready graveyard at every fissure in the ice, and a friendly undercurrent.

Already in the great Winter Palace, the basements, nooks, crypts and innumerable lower rooms were filled with the furtive men and women "hangers on," a queer winter surreptitious colony. They mingle with the servants and soldiers on guard, and either hide away snugly to sleep or else plot in security all winter, under the very heels of the Emperor. Strange, uninvited guests, driven in by poverty and misery to lurk around the kitchens of a Caesar.

For prudential reasons, Durand had reported to the "dvornik" of her apartment house, where still she had her own den, a resting place, that she was going around as daily seamstress and lady's maid from house to house.

Using her room but once or twice a week, she was indifferent to the rummaging by the police of her scanty effects. For, she had arranged it so that its useless litter would tell no tales.

In reality, her "last resort" was a cozy concealment with some of the women attendants, seamstresses and laun-

dresses of the palace household. There was her own private citadel, always open at any hour of the night and filled with stanch friends.

It was from this changing, shifting entourage of the necessary hundreds "below stairs" that the billets, papers, and gloomy warnings of conspiracy are sometimes distributed even on the imperial dressing tables. They reach to the very beds and lace-curtained cradles of the terror-haunted imperial family. For the wild huddle of the menial throng baffles the attempt of the keenest spies to chase any one individual beggar. The strong arm of the police has been powerless for twenty years to accurately enumerate or control these floating self-constituted "members of the household." The interlopers fatten under the roof of the Romanoffs. They are of a certain usefulness in times of feasting or unusual demands of the palace work. The good angel of peace spread her white wings over the Zastrow household for a few fleeting hours of fancied security while that talking wire was at work. I was early awakened on this dingy winter day, and with a sigh, my cares and fears returned to busy me.

How Durand would communicate was to me an enigma. My letters. My last directions to my sister. The news for my clients. The orders to my bankers. I was now linked with Durand's fate. After coffee, the maid who was the unconscious bearer of the last night's message, said to Hermione as I stole into her room to confer that one of the laundresses wished to see her for some directions. "One of the laundresses!" she cried. "Oh, yes! I remember!" and she smiled peculiarly. "Show her in—at once."

The woman was shown up to our wing. I was not astonished to find the faithful French woman, Durand, before us in the guise of a "blanchisseuse." I dared not greet her. I longed to ask all her tidings, but my watchful companion anticipated me.

Hermione and her masked guardian retired to my room and I chafed as they were closeted for a brief time. My companion in danger was now fully enlightened as to the last night's occurrences. Their own plans for the future were quickly arranged. Durand informed Her-

mione that the assistance and ready disguises of all the palace working women were now at her own disposal.

The winter custom of wrapping the whole face in a white fleece wool shawl, not heavier than a thick veil, made her disguise almost impregnable. "I can always reach you at will, and I will watch."

Durand quickly prepared to depart. But when she asked me for orders as to the letters still in the hands of the police I conferred with Hermione. I was puzzled. It was decided to destroy them (if returned), and then substitute others of a more careful preparation to be written by me in the afternoon, and sent out of Russia by the next departure of any trusted friend. The police copies would then be useless to them. The interior of Zastrow's house was similar in its complexity of unofficial inmates to the more ambitious Winter Palace. Misery drives all the attendants, goaded by the police, to help each other, and the Russian working classes are kind and tender-hearted to misery.

Every artifice and stratagem is used. To the honor of the Russian character, be it said, only the higher foreign attendants ever betray their humble fellows or even their superiors to the bloody spies of the police for money. From the Baltic to the Pacific the hand of Russian charity reaches the poor and needy.

At the family breakfast all was as serene as usual. The Komaroffs, the General and his wife; all gaily rallied me on my escapade. While we prepared for the afternoon amusements and went on our varied paths (the ladies trifling with the daily round of hospitable enjoyment), that fatal key at the "Secret Bureau" was already clicking off its answers to the fabricated dispatches of the night before. So, while we all played, the enemy was sowing tares. General Haxo was gleefully immersed in his net-weaving to catch the leaders of conspiracy, to intercept cipher letters, to watch the doubtful arrivals, and to push on one cherished private plan.

By the operator, who had inscribed the replies as far as reported, sat Colonel Luboff, mute and diligent, in the dreaded presence of the ambitious and relentless general. He feared to meddle in this private scheme. The secre-

tary handed out one after another the different cipher books on demand. Their scattered record was as follows:

Paris.

General Michael Zastrow,  
Admiralty Quai,  
St. Petersburg:

Leave this morning. Please report condition of my brother to me, Berlin, Frederickstrasse Station, to-morrow afternoon. Leave there at midnight to join you. Please meet me. Madeleine Grahame.

The magic key had this to say for another faithful sister:

Mon Plaisir, via Kief.

Walter Grahame,  
Zastrow House,  
Admiralty Quai, Petersburg:

Dispatch received. Leave in a week. Will follow directions and telegraph. Justine Zastrow.

So, a loving girl, a true and devoted matron, were being drawn in by craft and fraud, to mingle in the last act of General Haxo's society drama, in unexploited tableaux yet to be arranged, in detail!—Helpless virtue goes always unarmed into the maelstrom of this cunning Russian duplicity. It moves along unresisting and with no hope but the distant clemency of the Emperor of fifty broken up nations. He is the most ignorant man in Russia, as to the woes of those who groan under his yoke. For, how could one man, without omniscience, taste the woes of a hundred millions, speaking thirty tongues?

Briefly and sharply the instrument ticked off the answers of the ready Muscovite agents.

(Cipher.)

....General Haxo .....Berlin. ....  
.....Petersburg .....  
.....Dispatch received. Dimitri waiting orders  
from Petroff. ....  
Baranoff.

The ready wily Greek waited now only for his chief's detailed directions, to dog the path of the girl summoned from Paris to the sick bed of her guardian brother. A long winter pilgrimage of love for a tender American girl!—Another quick response was a proof of how ready and sure the electric knot ties up the fates of those under the ban!

(Secret.)

....Police Bureau. ....  
 .....(Luboff.) .....  
 .....Orders received. Correspondence will be  
 all detained and sent in at once.....  
 .....For the Minister of the Interior.  
 ..... Karasoff.....  
 .....General A. D. C. ..

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The infamous breaking of the private seals of letters is an every day privilege of the Interior Department in Russia. It is elegantly done, too, in France, officially, and skillfully in Germany by amateurs. A few hours will duplicate any necessary crest or cipher, and the papers look inviolate. These little tricks are not unknown—even in free America!

All yields to the magic touch of the continental official everywhere, who screens this scoundrelism behind the thin shadows of his menial agents! In Italy and Austria, letters are gradually sifted through many curious eyes, also!

Luboff made up his neat “précis” of these replies,—entrusting all to the impassive Secretary! He had now no special interest in this “case!” For the fruits of this victory were the General’s!—and—the credit, too, would be his!

An hour or two wore away. The pitiless rise and fall of the magnet dropped, in private characters, these last tidings, showing the pawns of the game of live chess, all to be responsive to the guiding mind of the hidden player!

(Cipher—Cable.)

De Giers, for  
General Haxo,  
Petersburg.

From  
Washington.

Madeleine Grahame. Gray eyes; fair hair; figure medium; face round; height, five-three. Age, nineteen. Walter Grahame, passport. Issued, Paris Legation. No description here.

Barthélemy,  
Minister.

All was in readiness. Luboff finished his notes, clasped his private book, and returned the cipher codes. Rising, he saluted his chief. General Haxo was running over the reports of a dozen dark tangles of varied importance. His morning grist.

"Excellency. Report affair Grahame.—Final orders to me, now, if you please. I am ready to depart!" Haxo flashed his eager eyes in joy.

"Proceed," said the Chief, drily, lifting his head and sternly fixing his steady eye on the subordinate. The game was now spreading out its chances before him,—and,—he scented a coming victory!

Full report was made. No comment by Luboff, who stood as impassive as a Venetian bravo!—His arm and sword were ready!

"Good! Take your train. Report personally to me the arrival at the frontier of this lady. Send Dimitri's notes by wire from Eydtkunen. Telegraph summary from Wilna. The Secretary will answer. I leave him my instructions.

"Remember, Colonel" (as he extended his hand):—"Nothing turns you aside a single moment. I hold you personally responsible for her safety and every comfort. Use my full power—and—make no mistake. Remember that! Au revoir!"

Colonel Luboff saluted, and went out without a word! His path of duty led him to the four winds!

The Chief was alone. Jingling bells told that the Sub-Chief was on his road! And General Haxo smiled a pleasant, warming smile! "I think she will have many a tête-à-tête with me yet!"

Haxo studied long the answers as noted by the silent Secretary! His morning cigar was an excellent one! Good humor beamed on every line of his face.—With a contented expression he read off Madeleine's description.

"Ah! Yes! Gray eyes.—Fair hair,—and so on,—quite another person. I can perhaps compare these two varied types of American beauty. It is a pity to have to use her as a final evidence!—Duty!" he sighed, "Duty calls! I wonder if she is as handsome as the other," he mused. "N'Importe! This brother is rich, and the trip will do her good! He will be glad to say nothing!"

"Now for you,—General Michael Zastrow!" and the General gaily smiled as he tossed the papers to the nimble clerk, who locked them away in a private chest of the huge safe! There were strange histories of heart-break hidden away there! Words pregnant with doom!

The Chief's comprehensive mind attacked another ready file of memoranda, with great complacency.—For, one shadow-dance succeeded another rapidly in the varied responsibilities of his exciting calling! A human catch-all!

General Haxo was a very busy and a particularly well-satisfied man! Every day brought new fish to his outspread nets! He had the official confidence of the "Czar!" "a dangerous friendship!" and, sometimes, in his wakeful hours, he wondered, himself, if a turn of the tide might not sweep him away—like Loris Melikoff—a banished exile—to distant shores! While this good supervising work was going bravely on,—I, still disconcerted and anxious for my letters, was looking over the papers at the English club. I spent all my time with the most powerful of the family friends, when moving around the interesting city, and I usually found them at the Grande Italienskaia, behind the windows of

the club, dating from great Catharine's kindly permit to an English favorite, the happy Gardener.

Prudence caused me to abandon the more ordinary haunts of the tourist. I felt the tremors of the coming upheaval. I feared some scheme of the pawns of the Police Chief! and, I was now sure of nothing—but the necessity for my departure, and—Serge!

The quiet bow of Mademoiselle Dauvray was our only usual exchange of distant salutations at the family table! Her eyes were now to me very keenly observant of every new shade of our society "dress parade" actions! Perhaps I was only too timorous! and yet, I feared the sleek, self-controlled spy. Was she digging her pit now for Serge? I courteously ignored her existence:—feeling that distance was the safest armor! And, I decided, to assure myself of her presence in the house before I ventured on further night expeditions!—I must baffle her!

What would Durand receive at her report to the police. Ah! Hermione would hear that in some way soon! If I could only get my warning to Madeleine and my business tidings safely on their way!"

I tried to think over a safe way out! I had pushed my legal business as far along as possible, and if a departure could be made which would be not a flight, I was ready! For my substantial, legal victory was won! But, I could not!—I dared not abandon Hermione.

To rid the Zastrows of Hermione's dangerous presence was my only wish! And—still, she was so noble, so steadfast, so devoted to Trepoff—and—young and lovely,—life offered her still its golden crown of love!

Justine was safe in her property and peace.—The most devilish ingenuity could fasten nothing on her. For her husband was a tried official of the navy—and—a great country proprietor! She was absent and innocent! Thank God for that! My real sister was far away and safe! I alone would be endangered in any fracas. There was the general disgrace and future official distrust of all the Zastrows! Hermione was, however, in mortal peril! I feared that Serge Zastrow's plan was becoming too complicated to succeed!

Could I not get Hermione to Warsaw and smuggle



her over the frontier at night? Could we not depart alone — without the Komaroffs? — Some excuse — and with letters to the General at Warsaw?

Would the Mouravieff friendship not help us now? The Councillor was all powerful! — his lovely consort and the Komaroffs yet enjoying the wide range of social pleasures of their favorite city. They all seemed to be strangely fond of Hermione. — The little Countess Vera was daily making a higher throne for herself in Serge Zastrow's heart, and the Dauvray had never suspected her recreant lover's real devotion.

There was an added reason for them to linger in the gay capital. — Vera had confided her love to her indulgent mother's heart! Serge was true as steel. The little Princess would assist. I could not make a plan for myself! I could only wait events!

How much should I tell Captain Zastrow of my private troubles? Would it only excite him to rashness?

While thinking of all this, the Club Steward brought me a note marked "Immediate." The Zastrow family sleigh was at the door in all its splendid state.

My charming little friend Vera wrote that an aid of Count Mouravieff presented his compliments, and requested me to call at that noble's Palace on the "Moika" as soon as possible. My heart beat violently, in the view of my intercepted correspondence being thrust at me!

But, in obeying, I lost no time! — wrapped in the warm sleigh robes. I wondered what the great noble really wished of me, — as I dashed away.

The flying hoofs spurned away the soft snow. I had only time to reflect that Count Mouravieff, though a retired statesman, was still "aide de camp of the Emperor," and Chief of the Council. In this capacity he saw all the secret reports! and much passed before his eyes which never reached the world!

He was, moreover, allied to our warm friend, the Komaroffs!

"Thank God! I will be in friendly hands!" I murmured, as the sleigh stopped at his door.

We drew up before the stately private residence of the great, retired diplomat. — It was the home of a man known

over the whole civilized world.—A man who had juggled for empires.

I sent in my modest card.—In a few moments, the “majordomo,”—a relic of the foreign career of the great man, returned. I was treated with the extreme of “high consideration.” Ah—I was expected!

“General Mouravieff would receive me in his library at once.” I began to breathe in the hopes of some pleasant social interlude. I followed my usher up the marble stairway with a quickly-beating heart. For—my nerves were all agog!

I was announced in a long preamble of high-sounding Russian as I entered a vast room, with many windows facing on the grand canal of the Moika! A fine library filled half of the great apartment. The other was superbly decked with military trophies, articles proudly recalling the career of the soldier-statesman,—and many noble hunting relics! The record of past exciting hours by flood and field.

Rising from a great working desk, the Count came half way to meet me, with a courtly grace.

Speaking in the purest English, he said, slowly—“I thank you for coming at once,—I wished to have a little talk with you! Pray be seated!” and I controlled my bounding pulses as he rang a silver bell. A servant brought tea, wines and varied smoking materials! I stole one good look at the man who had, sword in hand, helped to capture, in his fiery youth, the great Circassian rebel “Schamyl!” He had laid the victor’s sword aside to become as fine as an Italian magnifico—as wily as a bright-browed Greek, and as gravely subtle as a Spanish Don! He had skillfully outwitted the unspeakable Turk in a long conflict of patient “diplomatic intrigue,”—an art which, “we of the baser sort,” would call polite lying to order!

Sixty-five eventful years had not bowed his stalwart frame! In the full uniform of a General aide-de-camp, his high brow, restless, glittering black eyes and abundant dark hair, brushed straight back over his ears:—with a thin, drooping black mustache, as quaintly pencilled as a Chinese mandarin,—showed his pure Tartar descent.

And the fine, subtle brain worked calmly, while the restless eyes blazed with a hidden fire,—a man to defy obstacles—to wait, to crush his foe at last.

Grave, ready, courteous, his roving, keen black eyes measured me in evident interest, and I thrilled in expectant mental excitement! Why had I been courteously drawn into his meshes!

Accepting his offers of a cigar and a glass of wine, I watched him then prepare his own tea, *à la Russe*, in a superb golden-framed crystal cup, an Emperor's gift,—while he calmly selected a cigarette of huge dimensions from a pile ready on a Turkish filagree tray! The dreamy perfection of the Mussulman's unequalled arts!

He pleasantly led the conversation on from his own younger days to army life, and then his English, Continental and Turkish diplomatic experience! He was playing me—studying me, “sizing me up,” as it were!

Deeply interested and charmed I was! The younger campaigning in the Caucasus vastly interested me. I forgot my pending woes in following him, in the romantic pictures of his youth. The ex-Premier took down the splendidly-mounted sabre of the great Circassian rebel “Schamyl” from the superb central trophy on the wall. It was a grand array of all the great chief's armor and panoply!

He lightly swung the Damascus blade till it whistled keenly! and yet he sighed, as he said,—“The fighting days are past! The pen is mightier than the sword! The steel rail ties up the world to a hum-drum bourgeois peace! The world has lost its chivalry! Men like Schamyl are born no more! The hero mould is broken!”

In a few moments our conversation drifted to the grand gala opera night! “Ah! Yes! I must attend! It is almost *de rigueur*! My wife, of course, is too loyal to miss it!”

I asked “*pro forma*,” for the Countess, for we had all, in due state, made our return *visite de ceremonie*, and been drawn here upon a personal summons!

After a few minutes the host remarked,—“Now, Mr. Grahame! I will be very frank with you! I sent for you

to ask you a question. Do you intend to stay very long in Russia? Here, in Petersburg?"

I was not prepared for such perfect directness! It staggered me!

He eyed me keenly! and I asked myself, in vain, what was prompting his question? Was my correspondence in his hands?

I remarked, "I have some large interests here to look over! I may have to return next year! May I ask you, General, why you inquire?"

"I'll tell you," was his measured answer, with a most engaging candor in his grave voice. "I am, you perhaps know,—still something of a personage,—'though not at present on the active list'," said he, with a faint, sarcastic smile. I felt the worst was at hand! My secrets were in his cool keeping!

I bowed in silence. "The whole world knows that you are very near your Imperial master!" I politely rejoined. He smiled.

"In my capacity of President of the Council, and as aid to His Majesty the Emperor, I always know a good deal of what is transpiring!" So he quietly continued, eyeing me with a friendly interest.

"You are a stranger to our land! You are friendly with my own friends and near relatives, the Komaroffs! I like your own people here, the Zastrows. They are old and loyal servants of the Czar. There is some busybody mixing up in your private affairs; and in a manner which threatens to make your stay here in the future unpleasant,—need I say,—dangerous even!"

I started!

"If I were you, I would quietly arrange and then leave Russia in a very few days! Can you do so without any special trouble to yourself? Any sacrificing of the legal interests you represent?"

"I can go in a week, General! I would like, however, to see Moscow and Warsaw before I leave," said I, artfully disguising my real concern! But, my secret fears would have given me wings! I envied the birds of the air!

"Very good! Just the very thing! Komaroff is down

there at Warsaw! He will make it very pleasant for you! I will also give you a special letter to General Gourko, who is now Commander at Moscow! You can then go out by Moscow, Warsaw and Vienna! You will, I beg of you, understand that this is strictly confidential, Sir!" said he, rising. "There are things which I can not explain,—but, trust a friend—an old soldier, and—follow my advice, I beg!"

I rose and thanked the kindly Muscovite noble. I understood the delicacy which would shield me—a stranger, and betray no duty!

"May I ask one question, General?" said I, as I prepared to take leave.

He turned his eyes on me with a faint shade of polite weariness!

"Certainly! my dear sir. I am at your service!" was the answer.

"Can I tell this to my sister?" I flatly queried. "For I wished to secure Hermione in the *laissez passer* of this great noble's outstretched hand!

The General gave me a sharp glance. I had been most unfortunate! I had tried a clumsy riposte in this polite fencing!

"I would much prefer not! I have met your charming sister at our reception! The Countesses Komaroff are both devoted to her! I would be much pleased if you would not unnecessarily alarm her! You know what women are?" He smiled meaningly. "In fact, Colonel, the curiosity is rather devoted to her own private affairs than to you! If you have any future annoyance, you can, however, count on me! Madame Komaroff and Vera are extremely fond of your remarkably handsome sister!" He paused. "You understand me! I am sure!" And then I felt in my heart that this great patrician suspected me—and, would save scandal!

He offered his hand. I pressed it warmly. I was then courteously shown out of the superb working room of the warrior diplomatist.—I had received a warning of the most imminent danger—and—been pointed to the "way out!"

As I walked down the stairway, an idea came to my

mind. "Why is he willing to help to shield a smirched woman? An impostor! Count Mouravieff does not want the faux pas of the presentation of a suspected woman to society to compromise his noble wife's grande levée. For, the Komaroffs, his relatives, vouched for her!" I saw Serge's bold game of social bluff! They will all tacitly help us, and the whole Zastrow clan also! We must get away from the winter city as soon as possible!

I stepped briskly into the waiting sleigh, big with my news, and soon rejoined my anxious secret comrade in danger—Hermione.

The dark afternoon was waning in gloom! All was quiet at the Zastrow home, and I recounted my interview in the shelter of my "sister's" room. Hermione agreed with me I should make the attempt to go out by Moscow and Warsaw.

"He suspects! He all but knows the truth! Only Serge Zastrow's skillful imposture saves me now from arrest! My God! What a slender reed!" she moaned!

Our factotum, Durand, had brought back my captured letters! To shield my innocent sister, Madeleine, from any possible future trouble, I wrote her the same general substance as before, in carefully veiled words, only to meet me at Munich, and using a new date to correspond with my probable arrival. She would find my news with our Consul. To the bankers I changed the letter, giving to them a new cablegram for America, as I intended to linger now with Madeleine some time at Munich! I would get Hermione out safely, please God, over the frontier, and then leave her dangerous society at once! Then, with my sister, I would join Justine later in the summer at Kiev, having gone back by Warsaw with the real Madeleine, in case all passed over quietly, and the Zastrows were unquestioned! To Trepoff and the passionate Hermione, I would leave love's paradise of the future!

This was one indicated route. I had Mouravieff, Gourko, and the General Komaroff as powerful active friends! I also now counted absolutely on Vera Komaroff acting for me, with Captain Serge Zastrow himself at a pinch, to come as far as the frontier, and see

us over that dreaded, invisible danger line. Yes! It all looked very practicable!

For that very afternoon Vera had hidden her blushing face on her new friend's shoulder. She told her that Serge Zastrow had spoken to her mother that very day, and the gracious Countess had guaranteed her gallant husband's consent to the marriage of these light-hearted lovers!

Young love! First love! True love! Magic plant of Paradise, growing pure and delicate in the icy realms of the Czar! And, thank God! I had met one pure white lily of love blooming here in the icy waste of these northern skies!

This Edelweiss of the arctic blooms under Slavic snows in the maidens' hearts! For, man has not known love till he has clasped an ardent, fiery Russian to his beating heart!

Tender and winning are the plaintive love songs of the Russian peoples of all grades! The woman's heart is the same everywhere! But, it wildly awakes its most witching strain, trembling under Russia's skies!

I was pleased at the whole outlook. The skies seemed to have cleared! Golden love clouds reflected a shining happiness on these dark days! Perhaps Mouravieff was bidden to spirit me away with Hermione, and kill a scandal! Only a positive denouncement could now prevent our going out. We agreed to broach the subject at dinner and not wait for the opera! For Count Mouravieff's hint was a most meaning one,—a veiled order!

This was at last decided on! I knew old General Zastrow would be quite relieved to have us depart. He liked his quiet hours, and the child's prattle! He lived in a strain under his load of sorrow and general family care! For the sunset days were growing very short! He was old and feeble! I drove out alone after dinner and found Marie Durand waiting for me by a summons secretly conveyed in the main arched gate of the square of the Winter Palace. A safe place for any one!—In the Bear's Den!—I stopped the sleigh at a place agreed on by my sister. I walked under the great arch and met Durand in a few

moments! She disappeared with my new letters and documents for Paris, and returned in joy to tell me they were in hands of safety. An interior mail towards Siberia via Kief was leaving that night under the control of reactionists who were high officials! A secret Paris mail was also departing for the frontier, in the hands of a veteran First Valêt, to an Imperial Grand Duke going on a brief run to taste Parisian novelties, and extend his knowledge of the gay world à la mode de Paris!—A strange escort to the “red records.” The royal baggage, never inspected, would carry a good mail for the desperate revolutionists. Truly strange deals, these were, playing with the cards of life and death,—in that ever-desperate game! The devoted few against the hosts of the great colossus of the North!

But, so it is! Force must be always met with craft! The fox outwitting the grim King of Beasts!—And, these paltry victories of petty craft, alas! how unavailing!

I thanked the good Durand, and regained the house of my friendly refuge! I had now closed my whole preparations, and waited only the chance to depart!

In the salon, our own familiar circle was merry enough! The announcement of our impending departure caused Trepoff to arrange the details of our escort to the unavoidable opera party for three days later. He alone was gloomy! He was loth to lose Hermione! For, her love had grown to be his daily life! once parted, when would they meet! Duty might divide them, perhaps accident or death sever them forever! It would be months before he could join her abroad!

The grand opera was to be opened for the winter! The loyal Russian nobility and boyars would hail with joy the renewal of their annual splendidly luxurious social reviews before the eyes of their mighty ruler!

The whole Imperial family would favor the loyal public with their august presence!

And this would be our first and last appearance en famille, a trial which it had been found impossible to avoid! For, Madame Komaroff's displeasure would be fatal. Major Trepoff with Madame Komaroff and the happy young Countess Vera, arranged all the details of



the evening's 'sortie en masse,' while the frightened Hermione and I exchanged meaning glances in a gloomy apprehension. We sighed for the signal to go forth! Serge was revelling in the seventh heaven of his new-found happiness! For, the pledged assistance of Vera's mother renewed every doubt of his happy union!

Our whole party was to dine for the last time together at the Zastrow mansion the next night, as Captain Zastrow took it kindly on himself to arrange our proposed departure. For we would not dare to trust Dimitri Trepoff at the station, with the eyes of Hermione pleading in parting!

Not a break had occurred in the pleasant links of our general friendship, and the suspicions of the Zastrows had never been aroused for a moment! I saw, with pleasure, that Hermione felt now sure of getting out safely, if we only reached Warsaw unmolested: for surely General Komaroff would aid us, coming to him with the escort of his wife and daughter, fresh from the home of his lifelong friend,—and furnished with Mouravieff's credentials! Even Félise Dauvray's eyes ceased to follow Serge as he lingered near Hermione! Had she relented?

Yes. All looked serene. The only cloud on my mental vision was that evening's espionage! The sudden pouncing down on Marie Durand! The attempt to criminate me with the dangerous documents of Nihilism! Did they hope to trap me as a bearer of illicit tidings? And,—the one we now shielded as our joint trust of honor! She had been never annoyed! Not a hostile glance! What did it mean! I marvelled! I was astounded at the absence of Haxo and his mysterious brother General!

Had Haxo the power to annoy us further? Did he know anything, or only suspect? If he could not prove positive guilt before our leaving his sphere of action we might get away unscathed! He had been baffled once, and I had now Mouravieff, Gourko and Komaroff,—all men who hated the trade of a military policeman: to officially wink at our going! Trepoff, too, was in high favor with the Grand Duke, and his days were unmolested now!

We decided to keep as quiet as we could, and our last

tempting of Fate would be at the opera. Had the first suspicion been allayed by our prudence? So—I fondly dreamed in hope!

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## CHAPTER VII.

### AT THE OPERA—RECOGNITION—SERGE ZASTROW TO THE RESCUE.

The day after my interview with General Mouravieff, the Bureau of the Military Police was ruled by a happy man, in the person of its redoubtable Chief. There was a favoring tide sweeping homewards his barks from the seas of chance!

One virtuous action in sequence leads quickly to another! He had sent the following consoling dispatch, being a very gallant man,—this incipient lover of Hermione—to allay the natural anxiety of a loving and solicitous American woman! Ah! General Haxo knew the fond woman's heart, but too well! An expert!

(Open.)

Mme. Madeleine Grahame. . . . From Petersburg  
Fredrickstrasse Station,  
Berlin.

Yours received. Your brother a trifle better. Needs your kindest care. Telegraph to me from Wilna. Will meet you.

Michael Zastrow,  
Admiralty Quai.

This very fortunate afternoon the crowning reward of official virtue also duly arrived! It much cheered the industrious and thoughtful Chief! For his harvest was now nearly ready for the sickle! He had planted the seed of a wonderful growth!

(Secret.)

General Haxo. . . . .from Eydtkunen....  
Military Police Bureau, Petersburg.

Report myself. Orders fulfilled. Dimitri confirms identity. Lady arrived. Has regular passport. Proper description and name! Shall accompany her. Dimitri waits your orders here. I will report from Wilna.

Luboff.

"Very handy! the comforting telegraph. It makes fine work possible!" murmured the General, in ~~delight~~ delight, as he lit a soothing cigar. "Now! To arrange for the young American lady's coming. For her courteous welcome! My birds are all ready! I can easily spring the trap!—and—when the frightened ones flutter away—one—the Bird of Paradise is mine!"

It was with the consciousness of duty well done, and the glow of some honest (?) pride, the pleased General scanned the box sheet of the gala opera now submitted to him! Every three hours till the conclusion of the performance, the occupants of all the boxes were checked off on an official list! For, like an Englishman, Haxo wanted to know—"you know!" He was responsible for any dangerous outbreak!

After six o'clock on the eventful evening, not another billet could be sold to the public. It would be his own crowning honor—a pleasing duty—to report then in person, to the Emperor. He would also be chosen to stand at the box door of royalty, during this most memorable social evening! The safety of royalty was his especial military charge. And, there were others, too,—the dreaded Third Section—the sly civilian mouchards.

General Haxo hummed "Ah! non giunge" with all the gusto of a true connoisseur. For his heart was strangely light now. Running over the list at hand, with the last entries, his eye sparkled! Two of the boxes splendidly placed near the Imperial Loge, bore the names "Trepoff!" and "Komaroff!" The names of our entire family party were entered on the private list for attendance!

"Ah! yes—decidedly! I shall enjoy this opera! We

only want the travelers now!" Madame Justine—from Kiev! Miss Madeleine herself, and the family circle will be complete—with one extra bright particular star! My star!" He grinned in delight and softly rubbed his jeweled hands. He was never weary in well-doing, the good General; an energetic moral engine of Reform! A really energetic—and forcible reformer!

While General Haxo was preparing for the secret supervision of the opera, I, prompted by Captain Zastrow, made my official call and sent in by the Dvornik to the Chief of the Passport Bureau of the Interior Department, our passports to the visad for Germany in view of our approaching departure. I paid the fees for both and was startled to hear that I would receive both the "permits to depart," with the returned passports early the next day! Then nothing held us back. For Madame Komaroff was also ready. It was the golden hour!

All went well. I saw my associate lawyers, arranged our business programme to close up the mere formalities of the settlement of the heavy claims. I remained with Hermione at home afterwards, as I did not wish to risk new adventures! And, what an hour of mutual rejoicing!

"Ah! Serge has carried us over the rapids! God bless him!" cried Hermione.

"And, Trepoff!" I smiled.

Some unseen influence was now smoothing the way out for me! I blessed Mouravieff and counted the hours.

"Dimitri will join me, via Sweden, in a month, at Brussels!" whispered my sister pro tem., with blushing cheeks.

All our small preparations progressed. Serge had quietly arranged every detail as to our personal affairs,—even my money matters, and Hermione's luggage would be merged in the Komaroffs' impedimenta!

He would run down to Warsaw, under the care of our friendship and ask the General Komaroff, privately, to give us a smart young staff officer to see us over the frontier at Alexandrowo. This was a new idea of lovely Vera, the bright-eyed, vivacious daughter of the noble house!

"You see," said she, "it is just the same, and neither of your faces is known there!"

"A capital idea!" cried her happy lover.

I was alone, for all our ladies were busied with toilette engineering. General Zastrow accorded me time to thank him for a very agreeable family visit, which he demanded should be repeated in planning out our future course as to the family movements. "My friend! I feel as if you were one of us,—and, you must bring Justine, too!" I colored in conscious shame!

We were a gay party at dinner. Merrily we pledged a cup to our speedy return to our friends and home!—And—"do swidanya!"—the pretty Russian phrasing of "come again." I was ashamed to deceive the dear old hero!

My happiness might have been alloyed if I could only have read the telegram which was the very last link of Haxo's genial series of officially assisted volunteer correspondence! It would never, however, reach its intended address! Ah! No! It might warn us!—and—that opera party might be deferred. Its resting place was the office safe, in the hands of the police.

Mon Plaisir,  
via Kief.

Walter Grahame,  
care General Michael Zastrow,  
Admiralty Quai,—  
St. Petersburg.

Leave to-morrow. Arrive next day. No letters from you. Well.

Madeleine.

"I think this is what I might call 'la fin de l'histoire'" —mused General Haxo. "The play now plays itself out, —and—I will enjoy the last tableaux. A genoux. Yes! She shall beg of me!"

The morrow dawned. I was now in full readiness to depart! The passports had arrived with the full official visas! I felt a secret urging to take the very first train. I felt undefinable influence drawing me away. A secret voice crying, "Hasten! on your life!" I wished to see the gates of the long-desired frontier, and the first glance at the German colors would be the signal

of a blessed release from bondage. To see the American flag again at home, with my dear and true sister at my side, would be Paradise! And, the shy face of the demure Quaker girl who now owned a controlling interest in me! I longed for her bright smile! Hermione and I discussed every means of avoiding the ordeal. We could not, without the very greatest suspicion, now refuse the opera party. The invalid fiction had been exhausted. It would be a fitting close to the social successes of the visit,—this grand full dress family parade,—and,—so we dared not try any lame invention of the last hour. No! Besides, Serge, with us, was a tower of strength, a powerful aid in the event of a sudden flurry or the occurrence of any unhappy official juncture. He was so quick-witted! His demand for the hand of his fiancée was only a matter of form. The happy Vera had now written her own sweet confession to her august father, and while he dallied, in tender regret, she had received a warm-hearted intimation of his final favorable decision. The pretty fairy took all for granted now, as her delighted mother seconded the spoiled child of Love!

So, Serge would link me to the Komaroffs, as a connection of blood and interest, which, though distant, would still seal the secret of my inadvertent generosity, my rashness in aiding Hermione, especially when Trepoff had claimed her for life.

The day wore on. I visited the florists' fairy bowers. In my capacity of "brother" I sent to Hermione my first love-offering of the kind. But, Dimitri Trepoff's princely generosity had loaded her with fragrant wealth!

To the charming Vera, I sent a floral reminder of her kindness, and yet, only of a modest nature. For, I did not dare to rob Serge of the unspeakable joy of giving fifty roubles for a corbeille of roses and fair camelias, for his young captive fairy! I was in as eager a flutter as a débutante rosebud at her first, her very first "swell party!" And yet, I was not sure at heart!

Trepoff florally expressed his compliments to the hostess, and Vera, too, not forgetting Madame Zastrow. While the ladies were happy in these winter-born blossoms, dark shadows of fear gathered around my own

brooding heart! It was, indeed, a long day of expectation. The grand opera long had been opened, warmed, searched, examined and every precaution taken; and, as I drove by, on a little outing for fresh air, I marked the squads of soldiers, the crowds of police hovering there, for I knew my suspected enemies now, and I prayed that they would ignore me absolutely—and my provisional sister in their lynx-eyed attentions!

A battalion of the guards were on duty early. Palace officials, aids and inspectors hovered in busy earnestness around the grand facade of the magnificent Temple of Music. It seemed as if Caesar would hold a royal court in the temple of Polyphemia! I would fain have been hiding in a cellar! Huge bonfires burned in the square, for the purpose of keeping the hundreds of drivers warm in the long waiting hours. For, the days now were a few twilight hours and an eighteen hours' stretch of Cimmerian darkness, half of which dead hours the revelers called "daylight." Double pickets of mounted cossacks occupied every corner. The Circassian Body Guard was mounted, and ready to take charge of the Imperial cortège. There seemed to be nothing left in the way of loose strings in the department of my energetic enemy, General Haxo. The party of the great would include court officials of the highest rank and the Dames of the Palace,—with those brightest jewels of the Russian crown, the Maids of Honor, the very blossoms of the budding aristocrats! These fair graduates of the Imperial Catherine Institute were the especial protégées of the gracious Empress, and their patrician loveliness alone, in the language of the circus bill, was worth the whole price of the admittance. There could be nothing more brilliant in any modern court. The decorative preparations, too, were of a really Asiatic splendor. For a long purse has the White Czar, as well as a long arm to wield it. In the afternoon I left my parting card at the American Legation. As soon as I had received my passports en règle, I telegraphed openly to the Paris bankers to send no more letters to Russia,—but all to Vienna to their agency. For, was I not safe now? I had freedom in my pocket!—so I fondly dreamed! I naturally sup-

posed Madeleine,—whom I hungered to see once more,—would get this at once! The bankers would surely notify her at once, and so I saved my extra roubles for a duplicate.

I could not know that the flying wheels were even now bearing both my dear ones toward the Czar's capital, summoned by the lying messages of a man who joyed already over my social disgrace—and final ruin. The last ceremonial dinner ended, the mysteries of the toilet claimed our ladies. Thank God, the eyes of Félise Dauvray were gentle and kindly. Her quiet manner had disarmed my fears. For, she looked now pensive, gentle, even shadowed with tender regret. The Mouravieffs were to join us at supper later! We made one grand representative family party for the opera, and were to return to the Zastrows for the gay finale and the drinking of the stirrup cups! I could scarcely believe it to be true, so happy was I! When Hermione entered the salon, it was long after all the other ladies were ready. They were all Birds of Paradise in the plumage of the mystic arts of Fashion! But, she shone them all down—a witching vision! I had so many cares weighing upon my bosom, that I had so far ignored all masculine curiosity as to my unknown sister's last public appearance! I did not yet know her story! She only smiled and said: "Wait till Dimitri has the right to tell it!"

On her entrance, the gentlemen rose in admiration! Even the ladies, usually cool critics, were carried away with a sudden enthusiasm! She was simply radiant! In royal white robes, her superb figure a dream of statuesque symmetry and loveliness,—a sweet steadfast face, tender and delicate, with a lingering shade of melancholy,—she then turned her shining eyes on me with a last glance of unutterable affection.

"Am I looking well to-night, brother Walter?" she said, with the unmoved accents of sisterly affection. I could only stammer an answer and secretly swear to adopt her forever. We were thrilled by the womanly beauty which seemed to cling around her, as a perennial blessing of the great Divine Mother: the principle of eternal Life, and Love! It seemed to implore our affec-



tion, our guardian care, our manly tenderness. Trepoff was spellbound! I whispered to her, when other congratulations were momentarily hushed, as I took her slender hand in mine—the ungloved one, flashing with jewels. It was as cold as ice! Her bosom heaved, in a sudden gasp, as I leaned over her and said: “Hermione, you are dressed for a wedding! You only need the wreath!”

She flashed one look of infinite sadness on me. A confidence,—an appeal for all my brotherly support on this night, the terrible crisis of her stay on the Neva!

“Mon ami, say, rather for a sacrifice! I have a presentiment of coming sorrow which weighs me down! Pray God that you—that these”—she swept her stately head around—“are saved, if the iron trap closes down on me!”

“Courage!” I murmured. “All will be well yet! Tomorrow night we will be at Warsaw, and—one more day will see us whirling past Thorn, over the smiling fields of Germany; and, then, you can tell me all—will you?” I whispered. She bowed.

“Yes; some day.” And as she spoke she turned away to perforce play her exhausting rôle of the adventuress—the social sham—with a sad heart. It was at the risk of a momentary collapse. But, we tried to be lightly gay!

The strain of helplessly waiting for our escape, pent up and environed by unknown dangers, was evidently telling fearfully on her failing reserves of womanly strength. Ah! bitter it is to smile and juggle with one’s own life! Every preparation was now completed. Fans, hoods, cloaks, glasses and all the little weapons wielded by women in the “Merry War” of social life, were provided,—and we were ready, like a corps d’ elite, waiting the fatal order to move in as a forlorn hope! Two bosoms throbbed in ceaseless anxiety.

A last glass of champagne was gayly served. We drank to the Emperor! And, my toast was a prayer, a silent supplication, for that mercy which Fate, Fortune, Chance or Luck may extend—when Providence frowns!

The gentlemen were all resplendent in court dress and uniform. I was the fortunate unnoticed one. With star and order, aiguillette and ribboned sash, they were a bril-

liant trio,—while I was as cheerful-looking as an undertaker's assistant! The full dress of a gentleman of America! I cared not for dress; I only envied freedom! It was in such brave attire, with all their ladies, the great leading Russian families would rally in social loyalty around the Czar on this festal night! It was my fervent wish to "Rally round the flag"—to rally around the President of the United States of America, "irrespective of party"—and to keep rallying as near him as possible, with a strong preference for Philadelphia.

Our sleighs were in waiting. By Hermione's request, I remained in an especial brotherly charge of her! I could see that it was her own wish to avoid excitement and badinage, and that we should stand or fall together as an American double family eagle! It saved her the mockery of compliments! Alas! Poor tempest-tossed wanderer! I felt an infinite pity for her in this last circumstantial fraud. No one had a right to legally protect her. Her dark past cut off that hope! She was powerless now to rebel against the thralls of some great past environment, which I as yet but darkly guessed. Her life was a sad mystery! Its undertones were tragic,—its future more than gloomy! Flashing lights danced by us as we flew over the snow. Our wild, spirited trotters tossed their slender necks! They seemed to soar away in the crystalline night! And, we rode on to that pleasure which was an agony of deceit to the brother of the very handsomest sister in all vast Russia! My poor waif of Fortune! The ladies were silent all. These beautiful butterflies were bundled in fur robes and wraps! And, it was the still half-hour before the battle!

Pretty Vera had disappeared—a lost Péri—like a hidden blossoming rose,—as the fleecy sables covered all her beauty but her sparkling, youthful eyes, gleaming in First Love's ardor! Arrived at the Place de l'Opéra, we waited patiently in the long line,—between ranks of the splendid Garde à Cheval, the Russian Empress' matchless Body Guard,—the gallant corps whose regimental boast is the one never-forgotten "forlorn hope" charge at Austerlitz! For, even the stern Napoleon cried "Vivent les braves!" as these superb nobles went recklessly

through and through the steel hedge about them! Shining cuirasses, knightly helmets with double-eagle crests, drawn long swords, and high jack boots, made the white Guardsmen a magnificent spectacle as they sat, as if carved in stone, on their great chargers! Spartans in war, sybarites in love! "Les extremes se touchent!" The electric lights threw a splendor far brighter than the pale Russian winter sun of day over the great square,—and thousands gazed on the flower of the Muscovite nobility here, coming to greet the greatest ruler on earth!

Descending under a great canopy, we passed between the serried ranks of the renowned Preobajensky, the Emperor's famous Foot Guard,—whose many desperate attacks at Plevna had cost them scores of officers and hundreds of men,—the very manly flower of young Russia! Bayonet and sword glittered on every side! There was nothing wanting in magnificence! I sighed only for distance, for my republican home! Splendor and safety were both indicated by this grand display. No more glittering ring ever closed up around royalty than these colossal fighters! Hermione was nervously anxious as our party gathered in the foyer to enter the opera. She pressed my hand in a last signal and whispered pleadingly as we entered the vast hall, "Be my savior! Keep all strange people away from me to-night! I need your help, your friendly countenance! Do you keep your eyes fixed on me,—and, screen me, as much as you can!" I understood and nodded a promise.

The brilliant throng was now pouring into the great domed interior. We were crowded along by scores of the "notables" of the land! A very swarm of the "blue-blooded" of this strange growing autocracy of the world! The only impregnable modern throne! In a few moments, we reached our boxes, only removed by two or three from the Imperial Loge. It was a terribly exposed position, and would be swept by hundreds of glasses; but, it must be faced! Freedom lay beyond it! The four great tiers of boxes, exhibited the proudest gathering of the opening season. A hum of a thousand bees rose on the perfumed air, and the subtle thrill of beautiful woman-

hood nerved all pulses strangely! Nobles, generals, diplomats, society "lions" and the court ladies, a human garden ensconced in their boxes, made a most dazzling entourage! The pride of Life! Only the blue and gold decorations parted the open boxes, which were now flowery bowers of animated loveliness! I could have lingered a year to gaze, but my beating heart cried, "away, away," as the Chief lifted his baton. I dared not gaze at Hermione! The grand parquet was a solid mass of brilliantly arrayed officers and youthful aristocrats. And the play was off the stage—a real court, with a real Czar and an unequalled company of nobles! It was the gay fabric of a dream! Delicious music floated softly from the great orchestra, a subdued hum of passion-thrilled voices mingled with fluttering fans, and then the ripples of low laughter as old friends greeted each other! Many sweet secrets were flashed with a single smile! Our love was the one nearest the Emperor in our party. Serge and Vera Komaroff made up our complement. Their eyes were shining with new found love! It was their whole world! In the other, General and Madame Zastrow, Trepoff with Zastrow's fairy rosebud granddaughter, were placed around Madame la Comtesse Komaroff as the central jewel! Had I the right to have claimed it, pride in my "sister" Hermione's beauty would have filled my heart! She had no peer in all the assembled three thousand! Sweet Vera, in rose color, was the Hebe of youth and young love! No wonder the handsome sailor adored her.

Hermione sat with the satin opera cloak thrown back over her red velvet chair! Its pure white sheen, with the blue fox trimming, accentuated her indescribable loveliness, as she calmly surveyed the house, with a sweep of her glass! Ah! Poor daughter of Eve! She could be brave with an almost breaking heart! The royal dead white silk robe brought out in a delicate relief her exquisite face, with the tender, wistful dark eyes! I had never seen a loveliness to compare, never dreamed of such a beauty throbbing in life! She was a goddess of classic outline, an embodiment of the noblest perfection! And the whole Russian social world present shared my opin-

ion in a wholesale query of interrogative recognition! A new goddess! An Idalian vision! Who was she? The instant effect of her beauty caused a faint color to deepen on her pale cheeks! In low and musical whispers she busied herself with the lively Vera, turning skillfully away for shelter, while the lively girl described many of the more illustrious arrivals, as they filled up the remaining boxes! And in this forced occupation she forgot the sword of destiny hanging over her by its slender hair! I occupied Serge with general questions, my object being to relieve Hermione of any unnecessary mental strain! And so the moments glided along! The overture began and soon the grand interior was now filled to overflowing. The heavy reserves arrived in a stately tardiness—for effect! Hermione's bearing reassured me. She was regaining her wonted nerve control. Would this trying night sweep over in peace and day break for us in happiness? Suddenly the music paused and then the grand Russian National Hymn pealed out in majestic sonorous waves! It was the Czar! The Ruler of the Frozen North! The Ice King! All rose as the Imperial party swept in slowly and entered the state box. When the anthem was concluded, the overture continued when loyalty's respectful demonstration was ended! There was the strained thrill of the Master's eye upon every son of Rurik there, lifting up each proud heart! Fair and lovely was the delicate, graceful Empress in her dazzling robes. A gracious queen of night! She bore a prince's ransom on her neck in the great world-famed Volga pearl necklace! A matchless diamond tiara flashed on her brows, and by her side sat the manly ruler of ninety millions! A very King of men! An Ajax in bearing! The Emperor was in superb health, and near him his favorite brother, the popular Grand Duke Alexis—the very handsomest Prince in Russia! Several Aids, Chamberlains and Equeries were ready at hand, “on duty” in and near the Imperial box; a bevy of chosen “Dames d'honneur,” lent their witching presence, as a foil to the rather pensive beauty of the beloved Empress! But in all this splendid circle of human flowers, Hermione, my strangely found “sister,” easily shone the rest down! She ruled alone!

The opera was Rubinstein's "Nero." Its weird music and grand scenic effects soon enchanted the ladies. My eyes roved around in search of secret foes. I could not see a face on the stage—hear a note of the melody. My heart was restless. I was relived when the curtain rose, as Hermione seemed to feel now the nervous pressure of a thousand leveled lorgnettes! The sensation of her beauty was unmistakable and could not be disguised. The swelling strains and mimic tragedy proceeded. Thunders of applause, with showers of costly bouquets, followed the genial Emperor's hearty hand signals for a general approval, and the Czarina's delicate tribute of her own hand bouquet carried along all the house in a loyal imitation. When the curtain fell on the first act, my "sister" had regained her customary nonchalance and easy self control! I followed the local custom and walked alone around the gallery in rear of the boxes, greeting a Petersburg friend or two, and I wished to watch on private account. Serge could not be tempted from the side of the happiest budding Countess in all Muscovy, his own sweet, unspoiled Vera! I was happy at heart, for the hand of the evening was hidden! The coast seemed to be clear! Were we forgotten? On returning I saw a cold, distinguished man of grave appearance, in plain evening dress, without a single star or order, standing at the door of the Emperor's box. He seemed to direct every one by simple motion or courteous bow! A high-bred Figaro! Four gigantic grenadiers of the Foot Guard were on duty, and an immaculate young officer, "en grand tenue," was conversing with the dark official who looked "out of his element" at the opera, in plain clothes! It was easy to recognize the dreaded General Haxo!

Leaning over our barrier, I was astonished when the gentleman in mufti moved on past our box, greeting General Zastrow most warmly as he walked by the open arch! But, his eyes were glued upon the noble face of the woman whom I had sworn to shield from harm. Trepoff's mysterious love! It was our official visitor who had missed Hermione, and whose repeated inquiries had piqued and frightened Serge Zastrow. As he talked

with the old General he gazed fixedly at Hermione with that cool smile which is an insult! He faintly smiled as he passed us. I could have struck him dead in his tracks! But, this brute had the power to arrest, to detain, to betray! I whispered to General Zastrow, preserving my calmness: "Who is that man? Is it not General Haxo?" My friend's brow grew gloomy. He leaned to me and softly said, "Yes! Do not let him observe us! For you know he is the Chief of the Military Police! And, he has asked me to present him to your beautiful sister, whom he is very eager to know!" My blood chilled to ice. He, then, was unremitting on our path. His cruel, lurking smile seemed to threaten me as he eyed me coldly. Its every line said, "Beware!"—and as I followed his path afar, I could see him turn, with a glance as if of eager triumph, and it seemed to rest on the mysterious beauty, as if to say: "You are my prey!"

Hermione, fortunately, did not see him! The second act of the opera was now under way. I soon tired of the motley scene! My worry and heartache returned. My soul was far away—in America. I craved flight! The stage wearied me; my eyes roved discreetly now and then towards the box of the Czar.

I was looking idly at the glittering throng behind their Imperial Majesties when I saw a tall, dark, worn looking officer, in the uniform of a cavalry general, fastening his gaze with unmistakable interest on Hermione. It was the strange General I had seen in the sleigh—Haxo's fellow wolf! Something told me the hour had come at last! It became a positive fixed glare, for Hermione was now facing the stage, and was very intent on the music. She would have to make a half turn to see the circle of high functionaries and ladies in the Imperial loge! And I begged of Fortune that she might still hide her beautiful face. He evidently waited for her wandering glance to turn at last in his direction. Now a "bird of ill omen," General Haxo appeared at his side in a few moments! They were evidently conversing about us. Significant glances showed this. And my fears told me so. At last, at last.

My heart was beating fast! I was glued to the pillory,

and feared to warn Hermione! There was no help! No escape! We were trapped! Desiring, however, to prepare her for any sudden shock, I said, in an undertone, to Captain Zastrow: "Tell me, Serge, do you know that Cavalry officer near the Royal Box? Have we not seen him before?"

He took a furtive glance and then quietly said, with an air of positive aversion:

"Yes! He's a so-called 'loyal Pole'—an aristocratic scoundrel! A kind of a useful military renegade!"

Hermione started. Serge could not see her face! But she was now alarmed, and yet she did not turn around! She feared some danger! He calmly continued:

"There's an ugly story about that fellow! He's been banished from Court, on distant duty, for several years! I looked his record up! The story is around the clubs even, and only officials consort with him!"

Hermione's face was now drawn and rigid! I began to fear for the consequences, and I recognized her wisdom in the tactics—"eyes to the front!" Serge, unconsciously, went on, as if he were under some spell.

"He killed a gallant Polish nobleman named Count Oborski in a cowardly duel some years ago. He fired before the word, the low cur!"

Hermione started, and became ashy pale. I feared to breathe or speak. The stranger was now persistently and insolently waiting to catch her eye.

"His name is 'Alexis Radzivill!'" concluded Serge, "of our Asian army." And, as he ceased, my poor Hermione's fan crushed in her trembling hands. Like a drooping lily, her head then softly fell back helpless. I knew the curse had fallen. It was the dreaded hour! Serge gazed at me in a wild dismay. "My God! the crisis has come at last!" And this was what I whispered to Serge: "We are lost unless we leave here quietly at once!—now! Help me with Hermione!" Thank heaven, she heard my voice, and rose at once to her feet. I made a stern sign to Trepoff, who now stepped towards our box; for, as the curtain was falling, Serge and I assisted the half-fainting woman to the corridor of the ladies' gallery. "A little air and movement!" Serge whispered.



"Be brave now, my poor friend. Think of Trepoff!" "I am feeling better," she whispered, "and would fain turn back!"

"Shall we go home now?" said I, anxiously. "Can we two not escape?"

"Oh! no!" she hastily murmured, "I must not break up the party! I would not dare to! We must face the worst,—the very worst,—now!"

We walked to the end of the long gallery. A glass of cordial and a few moments' quiet restored Hermione. Trepoff had remained with Vera to prevent remark. No one had seemed to notice the seizure. "I can go in now and stay with Vera," said she, as she graciously thanked the manly, kindly Serge for his aid. He was deeply concerned, and I was at the end of Hope! We were all rising to return to our party when General Alexis Radzivil walked directly toward us. His face wore an impudent leer. What had Fate in store? My brain whirled. Ah! God! to be in America—only face to face—with this disturber! I thought of Col. Colt's six-barreled law!

Hermione sat like a statue, gazing blankly at the wall. Radzivil bowed formally to Serge, who must recognize the uniform, and paused. This was Haxo's "coup de main!" I saw the whole scheme,—an insult, a row, arrest, detection! The coward!

"Pardon!" said he, directing his address to Serge, "I believe I have met Lieutenant,—or is it Captain?—Zastrow before! Will you excuse me a moment?" Serge bowed and stepped a few paces away with him. I watched over my poor, trembling charge. At the sound of that voice Hermione trembled in fear, and I was now doubly anxious to see her safe from further interruption in our box. We moved away. If I could only reach our friends, and warn Trepoff! A presentiment of dark evil hung over me. I waited for Serge, who was exchanging a few evidently animated words with Radzivil. My brain reeled. They were quite in earnest, and I foresaw an instant trouble. The attitudes were menacing. Serge suddenly turned and strode up to me. "Quick!—quick!" he cried. "Take your sister back to the box at once and stay there," whispered he, quickly. "Send Trepoff here!"

Hurry! at once!—for your life!” But Hermione’s quick ear caught it. I motioned. Instantly her lips were compressed in silence. As we walked away, I then heard a sneering voice distinctly say, in French:

“Ask her if she remembers Arline Lazienska.” “Great Heavens!” murmured “my sister,” as she clung to me in fear. I felt her trembling now like a leaf in the storm. I hastened back to the box with her and instantly returned with Trepoff. I asked Vera to aid Hermione, for I would join them soon. All was apparently peaceful. Still, the two men debated. Trepoff and I hurried at once to the end of the corridor. The two men were there, and the tide was rising fast! A bloody floodtide to bear some one away! As we approached, they had passed swiftly into the gentlemen’s corridor. We followed. It seemed to be a common impulse to gain new ground. I whispered, “Trouble with Radzivill.” “Great God! what about?” said Trepoff, with an anxious brow. “He’s a mean devil!” “I don’t know,” was my reply. “I can’t imagine.” Trepoff’s face grew stony. We stepped into one of several private rooms. Radzivill had motioned to a passing friend, who now joined him. The plot thickened! The door was at once closed. We all remained standing, and an ominous hush was broken by the Pole. “Gentlemen!” said Radzivill, his voice trembling with the maddest passion, “I have asked Captain Zastrow to answer a polite formal question. He declined to answer, and will give no reason! I am accustomed to, and insist on, all the deference of my grade and rank. I now demand a categorical reply!” The hush was of the moment before the tornado. All scented danger. Serge was pale and stern. He stood there like a bronze figure. Gallant and loyal, I loved him for his manly bravery. “I absolutely decline to answer,” said Serge, coldly; his blue eye flashing. “And, to explain?” continued Radzivill, his rage now mastering him. “Positively!” said the naval officer, with a grim decision. “Vous êtes un lâche,” hissed Radzivill, overborne with mad hatred. “Compliments of Oborski,” said Serge, in a thrilling voice, as he laid his open fingers smartly in a stinging blow on the insulter’s cheek. It was done! And the code,—Death,—blood for a blow!

All was lost! And, perhaps Serge doomed to butchery! All rushed between. I thought of the laughing Vera. My God! it was horrible. "Gentlemen! Desist!" cried every one. "This blow calls for a different satisfaction;"—for all seemed to feel this would go on now to the side of an open grave.

Radzivill raged in the grasp of his friend, in vain. Dimitri Trepoff was very stately as he said calmly, standing with flashing eyes between the two men, "Enough, Serge! You are in my hands!" "Let me act now!" Serge quietly handed Trepoff his card case. The nearest friend of the crazed General bowed to Dimitri in all his semi-professional gravity. Radzivill was half-led, half-dragged, to the end of the room. We stood motionless. Nothing but a fight à l'outrance was now before Serge! His opponent's friend approached, and politely lifting his hat, said, with due ceremony: "Major Trepoff, permit me a single word! I fully represent General Radzivill!"

They retired apart, as I bent my eyes sadly on the Captain. I thought of the girl with the flower-like face,—his promised bride,—Vera! Serge opened not his lips; but his eye was as steady as the pole star. The two ambassadors soon separated. Explanation or any apology was out of the question. The grim code of Draco bound both men,—the laws of honor! Trepoff returned gravely to our side of the room, and reported. "Serge," said he, "the terms are to be pistols, ten paces; the time one o'clock to-night; the place, the Riding academy. He demands immediate satisfaction, and a fight à l'outrance! It is terrible! What shall I do?"

"Very well!" said Serge, in a hollow voice. "Agree to all!"

"Can I ask the reason of all this?" I began. But of what avail were words now?

The young Captain quietly laid his hand on my arm. "Not a moment to lose! We will return to the box. Trepoff, and I will leave on pretense of orders and go to the Yacht club. This may save all yet!" He finished. "You take the ladies home and join us there! We will go direct to the academy, if you can't be back there at twelve! Follow us out there! Not a word to the ladies!

It is imperative!" Gallant fellow! I clasped Serge's hand as he firmly walked to the door, lifting his hat with freezing politeness as he left the room. The silence was unbroken. The enemy were gathered around their man! I never turned my head to see Radzivill. I saw too much! I saw the shadow of Death, and I scented the air of a prison, too!

"Dimitri," said Serge, quietly, "all I ask is you will watch that scoundrel, in shooting too quick on the word! That's his pet trick!" The Captain was firm as a rock.

"I'll kill him in his tracks, if he fires a shade in advance!" said the intrepid Trepoff, who adored Serge with a personal affection, heightened by their relationship. We neared the box in quiet. All was peace, and the music rose in undisturbed sweetness. The play was unreal to us now. A grim game waited.

"Grahame!" said Serge, "Dimitri will have all my letters for Vera. You know what to do. We leave at once. You are a man of heart." I bent my head to veil a mist on my eyes.

I allowed the gentlemen to enter our loge first. The ladies were all perfectly calm and the curtain was up. As I walked along the corridor I saw General Haxo immovable at the door of the Emperor's box. The Radzivill party had not returned. Serge and Trepoff soon finished their whispered words of explanation to the ladies. I saw the young sailor silently take Vera's bouquet and single out one rose. My heart swelled up, for the woman he loved did not know he would face death with it on his heart. With smiling eyes, she whispered, in her girlish tenderness, as the sweet tyrant of his loyal heart. "Don't be late for the supper, Serge. Remember!" "Duty, you know, dearest," he said in a low thrilling tone, as he returned the flowers, which were his gift. "I'll return as soon as I can." "Please God, very soon. Amen!" I prayed, for I was tied down as a guardian. Again my ignorance of the language paralyzed me. Her soft eyes were tenderly fixed on him as he bowed himself out, and he gazed upon her as if in a last good-bye. Brave champion of our unknown! Vera was all unconscious of his peril. "It is better so," I murmured, "if it must be!"

Hermione graciously gazed with a loving interest on "our gallant cousin!" She knew not the culmination; but the look she bent on him would have thrilled a heart of stone. A message without words!

The gentlemen spoke to our party in the next box and muttered a few words to old General Zastrow as they departed. I could see the mute farewell of the gallant sailor going to the combat, and it wrung my heart; for Serge cast one fond look back at his beloved Vera, as he stood in the corridor, and then pressed the rose to his lips. They were gone! It was now ten o'clock. I exchanged meaning glances with Hermione, who was now eagerly longing for our departure; and we were not disturbed by General Haxo, nor the insulting Pole. My warning eyes said, "Silence!" Hers answered, "Yes!" The music grandly swelled out, but its melodies floated away all unheeded by me. What was the real basis of this quarrel? What grim old secret! For this scoundrel had recognized the woman who was yet a stranger to me. My sister! I felt that it was instigated by Radzivill and concerted with the artful Haxo. For what immediate reason? Ah! that I could not tell. But I would have given my right arm to read that cold, impassive fiend's thoughts, standing silently there at his master's door! It is well that we are not prophets; for it at least defers heartbreak. But one pivot had I for a theory. It was this: Haxo was surely aware our passports had been legally visad for our departure. Did he wish to delay us? Why? He could not efface the visas, I knew. The lists of departures for the use of the Police Bureau, though, were on his desk always. He knew our growing intimacy with the Komaroffs. Serge was now known to be the fiancé now of the lovely Countess Vera Komaroff. A last resort! To involve Serge in a serious duel would probably complicate us all, and would perhaps enable our arrests to be made. But was Radzivill a General willing to risk his life to please another man—to further his intrigues? "But why entangle Serge? To officially disgrace him—a popular and valiant officer? Why?"

A stroke of mother wit enlightened me. Haxo was determined to run Hermione down. Radzivill knew some

old episode of her life. And who thirsted for Serge's blood? Only that now happy she-devil Félise Dauvray! For, all the world knew Serge was accepted. It would revenge her wrongs! She had seen Serge's affection transferred to Vera, and her own blind jealousy of Hermione was now changed to hatred of the beloved little Countess. Here lay the truth! And yet, what bound her to Haxo, the head soldier policeman? Was he a favored secret lover—a patron? She had posted Haxo on Serge's intended trip with us, and Radzivill, despised and hated by all the Russian nobles, was probably a higher government spy! And a fair duel would clear his name in the clubs. A man can be brave, and a scoundrel, too! His price for removing Serge was oblivion of the old Oborski record. Yes! yes! it was clear! Haxo would shield him, if he killed the sailor. The fire-eating duellist Radzivill had not noticed me, but had forced himself rudely on Captain Zastrow. I was the lady's escort! Ah! he could not speak to me. It would be cold murder to kill me. So we were clear officially, and this dark plan was the only one. Scandal would result from the meeting. If Serge's name were coupled with that of some doubtful woman, it might break off this splendid Komaroff match. True, this exposed Hermione! Arch fiend! It gave Haxo power over the woman he desired, and revenged the governess. I did not dare warn General Zastrow as to the Dauvray trollop, till I was safely out of Russia with Hermione. Impossible! But I swore that he should know all! Justine could have Commodore Zastrow warn the old hero. My client's interests and my dear Madeleine now returned to me. If I were thrown in prison, then, what of both? In cold agony, I thought of Durand's words and the black crosses against the names of government spies. I prayed for the requital of the smiling French governess spy,—for spy she was! "How long, oh Lord, how long!" I groaned under this new burden. A serious wound to Serge—his death—would tie us up indefinitely. This she-devil would pay yet a price of fearful cost for her iniquity, I again swore; for detention meant the detection of my innocent passive fraud, and oh! my God, the death of Hermione, or her shame! She

could not be struck till after our departure. The Dauvray woman was safe until our ruin incited revenge. The burning, senseless, maddening desire inspired by Serge's desertion was now bending all her wicked craft to one end. For his ever drifting into her hands, after the Komaroff match was thus broken off, was too wild a possibility, even for French love dreams. Could she worm herself into such an ancient and loyal family as a police spy, however, her field of usefulness would be extended! Was she a paid spy? The moments dragged slowly by, and, thank God, all was tranquil with us. On the next fall of the curtain the whole Imperial party arose, and then, led by General Haxo, departed grandly by the state entrance. Society was now free to "follow suit." Policy caused the great ones to leave before the last act; for no danger in the confusion could attend this dignified flitting forth. The national anthem was played as the cortège swept down through double lines of guardsmen to the state entrance. No one could press on the royal visitors in any crush, under these wise rules. Many grand nobles and the families of the highest distinction gradually departed after their master. They had been noted on parade, and were glad to go. The rising of the imperial family was the signal for numbers bidden to previously arranged suppers and other home social events, to seek these new pleasures when released from their patriotic duty; for the sun had veiled itself. "Society's" loyalty had been vouched for in a general welcome of the Czar by those who glittered in the light of imperial favor—the happy moths of a court day. We also rose, and in the foyer, met Madame Komaroff, who had joined Count Mouravieff's family in their loge. The Count and Countess graciously greeted us. He was most cordial to me. He said, "I'll send you down the letters to Gourko early to-morrow!" He evidently knew of my action on his hint. Hermione's beauty was also flattered by him. "She is peerless—your sister!" the General whispered. "Take good care of her!" I started, for my mind was tortured with the impending event. It was now after eleven o'clock. How could I reach the Yacht club by twelve? How could I steal away, and not expose Vera to an

agony of fear? I could not confer with Hermione; we were still acting out the deceitful part which had enabled her to escape the dangers of her perilous mission so far. But of what avail our plans, if Serge were shot, and a general arrest followed? But at what cost we had plotted to depart. The worst was yet to come; and the burden bore heavily on us both. Would the day of deliverance ever "arrive?" Hermione feared a shadowed past—Radzivill's stories. I feared a dungeon. In our turn we all re-entered our sleighs. The flying coursers skimmed away over the snow with highest speed. I was half-crazed as I thought of Zastrow facing a dead shot's murderous pistol. All was tranquil as we assembled in the grand salon at home. The ladies were merry, and all unconscious of any shadow on the Barmecide feast prepared. Every second now might ring out a death knell! Ah! my beautiful sister Hermione read the secret of my paled face and shuddered in silence. She knew General Zastrow's eyes too gravely sought mine. I persistently avoided him. I could not explain. He would know soon enough. He knew that some social trouble had called his kinsmen away. The supper was announced by the butler. Mademoiselle Félice Dauvray entered the salon "*en grande toilette*." It was with the cool assurance of a Grande Duchesse. Evidently she was blossoming out. It occurred to me she had the rule of the whole house, in our absence. What was her real game? She was inscrutable. Calm, polite, and self-restrained, her "self-effacement" was guided by nerves of steel and a high-class conventional elegance. I was afraid of her calmly triumphant appearance, and her festal robes. I determined to search my rooms at once and see if any traces of her unwelcome presence were visible; for I doubted all—feared all—now. Capable of anything was that sleek young French woman! The ladies lamented the absence of our two preux chevaliers. I smiled, while each pulse throb sounded to me as a death knell. This chorus of regrets was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger, who asked for me. He sent into me an urgent letter. I hate lying above all things, and I had to lie meanly as I excused myself. In the hall I shuddered as I glanced at



my watch. Could I be of any use? Would I be able to excuse myself?—and on what pretext? My serious face I could not hide, and it was twenty minutes past eleven! Alas, useless, now! I must decide whether to go or stay. I burned to go. If I did it would surely betray the unusual. I debated with myself as I read the note in the anteroom. Would to God I could be at Welctsky's side! And how I suffered in my helplessness. I was touched at heart. Delicate-minded Serge enclosed a note for the young goddess Vera. His every moment was precious to his nerve and calmness. His last words were penned, perhaps, to his love! I closed my hand in reverence on it. Dimitri Trepoff wrote me, briefly, his own directions. "Deliver Serge's note openly! We go out there now. I will not object to advancing the time; fight as soon as ready; he will be still excited. Hope for the best. Say we will join you later. Keep Vera quiet and happy till we come. I will come myself or send a friend who goes with us for that purpose if Serge is hurt. Look out for Vera if grave results happen. Come where I send for you then. Stay at the supper and keep silent. Depend on me."

Trepoff."

I composed my tell-tale face, and then re-entered the salon, and handed Countess Vera the little note with a friendly and confidential air. Ah! the dear rosy trifler! How carelessly she gayly laughed and said, with a "moue mutine," "We will not wait longer for our gentlemen! They will come at the end of the feast, and they both beg us not to wait." So the "sister" whom Fate had given me was forced to laugh and smile while her champion faced death for her! "Half-past eleven" the silver gong of the old clock rang out. We sat down to the magnificent supper. General Zastrow devoted himself to the Madame Komaroff, and I heard ringing always in my ears the last injunction of Serge,—*"Take care of Vera!"* I stole an occasional glance at my watch, as with laughter and merry allusions to the absent, the supper proceeded. I was in a mute agony. The game for a human life—perhaps two men's lives—was being played out! One relief! Questions were not asked; for the service of the

Czar may at any time take the bridegroom from the very altar. The summons may not be gainsaid an instant. The Emperor has the right to instant and implicit obedience—women's arms unwind from husband or lover, without a sigh! The sweet, laughing-eyed Vera complained to me of Serge's defection. "A deserter! a deserter!" she gayly cried, when, in the round of toasts, his name was on our lips, in fond trifling, which grated horribly on my ears! Twelve rang out from the silver chimes of the great sculptured hall clock. Hermione's face was drawn and chilled as if cut in frozen marble. She, too, was on the rack. I shuddered in silence. Every instant now was, perhaps, that of the fatal word. No one suspected that it was a night of doom—this gala night! The great halls of the Cavalry Riding School were but a few minutes' drive from the Yacht club. Trepoff would not long delay. Laughter, light and love around the board! Hermione was busied forcing the merriment, while her anxious heart was breaking; vivacious Madame Komaroff sat happy, charming the whole circle with her witty sallies; lovely Vera vainly demanding her absent lover; sweet Olga proud of her opera night, fretting for her best friends, the owners of the two vacant chairs at this strange feast; and myself, harassed, heart-sick, fearful of the night, apprehensive of the morrow, and now feeling every tick of the clock in my bosom. Ah! what a tragi-comedy of social life! Dancing on the ice over the volcano's crater! And a strange gloom crept into our circle at last. Half-past twelve! General Zastrow reluctantly gave the signal to return to the salon. We filed in, a happy troop, and the protesting little Olga was haled away by the gray-eyed French Venus. On Vera's entreaties, Madame Komaroff accorded another half-hour of waiting. Music was an excuse to cover our watching for the two wanderers. In a mysterious way, the fear of the unusual had dropped a general shadow over us. Hermione had just seated herself at the piano, when a loud crash of bells at the door proved that a sleigh had suddenly stopped, from the highest flight of speed, in front. We all started up, and a general look of alarmed inquiry betrayed our souls to each other. Even

old General Zastrow was anxious now! I exchanged glances with the host, and reached the hall, closing the salon door as Hermione's grand voice rang out thrilling on my ear. It was a time of terrible mental tension! I feared the tidings. I would prevent, at all hazards, any sudden blow to the dear girl, whose heart was only open now to the chivalric sailor lover. The great front portals swung wide and a man sprang within. It was Trepoff, ghastly pale, and the snowflakes lightly powdering his garb; but he stood there, alone! My heart ceased beating, for his eyes were inscrutable. One warning glance! He pressed a finger on his lip, and darted back into the dark anteroom. I sprang in after him and closed the door. "Serge!" I gasped. "Safe!" he cried. "A bad flesh wound; ball glanced off the ribs; now at Yacht club!" was the rapid reply. My heart leaped up in joy. "I must tell them, now," he gravely said. I saw the shadow of death on his face. "Radzivill!" I gloomily ejaculated, as I caught my breath. Trepoff placed his index finger on the central spot of his forehead. He simply said, "Killed at the first fire! Serge aimed right between his eyes!" He dropped into a chair. "That broke Radzivill's nerve!" he muttered—and then covered his face with his hands. The scoundrel was dead at last! Merry voices floating out to us! The music had abruptly ceased! A sudden invasion of the laughing ladies would be next in order. They would all gayly storm our citadel. What should we say? More forced deceit! I was tired of this lying. I sprang to the door. Trepoff spoke. "Wait! For God's sake, get the old General here quietly! This house is now surrounded by the police! Quick!" Oh! God! the sword had fallen. I crossed the hall, and General Zastrow quietly joined me. I pointed to the door, and re-entered, gazing at the stern-faced Major. "Tell all the ladies that Serge will be back in the morning. He has gone down to Cronstadt, on a special boat—sudden orders. I'll come in a minute!" cried Trepoff. I fulfilled my mission and then excused myself for a moment. The ladies awaited Dimitri with some impatience, but no alarm. For, love is blind and happy until the sword of Fate pierces the heart. I re-

turned and found that General Zastrow knew of the duel, not suspecting the cause. He was collecting his thoughts. A strange event! Still he was an old soldier—and ready—aye ready. So far, good. But the police! What was their mission? They had, perhaps, been notified by Radzivil's seconds, or through him by Haxo. It was "in the Czar's name"—this cordon at night. Yes, undoubtedly General Haxo had sent the detail to guard the house on news of the fatal result. He had been able to exchange a few words at the opera, perhaps, with the Polish spy. And, was this a revenge for Serge Zastrow's fatal shot,—the tribute to his departed tool? Thank God, Zastrow was safe! The deadly ball had glanced on a rib and run around into the back muscles. But what would be the consequences of Captain Serge's victorious shot! A fatal triumph? Old Michael Zastrow had taken his parti. No time to explain now. He did not wish to needlessly alarm his pet Vera. He also wished to avoid any public scandal. He joined the ladies calmly; for, in the higher circles of the Russian services, duels, while regrettable, are considered unavoidable. He knew too well the police were only "on observation;" for otherwise they would have entered the mansion at their own sweet will. I breathed freer. Serge had not mentioned the cause of the quarrel in detail to Trepoff. So far all was safe! Lovely Hermione's lover had no intimation of the implied slander of her past. The cold scorn of the high Russian nobility for the dead Radzivil was caused originally by his treachery to the land which bore him, and then his cowardly assassination of Count Oborski, in a presumably fair duello. But it was all over with the bold villain now. He lay in a lonely store-room of the cavalry barracks, prone and stiff in death,—a handkerchief hiding the shattered forehead and a common soldier's gray overcoat thrown over him! For, friends and Fortune had departed with his lost usefulness!

A couple of careless Cossack sentinels stolidly watched the three candles blinking around his stiffening form. It was a tragic end,—a lonely last night of life! His friends had gone to report to his circle, and to make the

needed report as seconds with regard to the details of the fight.

We rose at last. Trepoff said, "Speak not a word! Let me talk to the family!" Crossing the great hall, we joined the wearied ladies. General Zastrow, Madame Komaroff, with earnest eyes, were communing seriously in the front salon corner. They had seen too many of these social differences end in blood. Hermione and Vera welcomed Trepoff, who was gayly led up to the table. And, the little comedy now pieced out the hidden tragedy. Outwardly pleasant, and unmoved, the Major eagerly refreshed himself with a welcome bit of supper, and then, explained plausibly the absence of the tardy lover. There was no sign of sorrow within the salon, or disturbance without the house. I sat quiet, after telegraphing to Hermione that all was well. She joined me at my side of the table in a few moments, and I then, drew her away in a window embrasure, briefly telling her the facts, for gay little Countess Vera was still chattering grand opera. My listener's mobile face froze in a sudden horror when I told her Radzivill was dead. "So soon—vengeance to overtake his lying insult, and by Serge's hand! What will become of Captain Zastrow?" she feebly questioned as she sat down. The sudden removal of her mortal fear proved to me that he was the one man feared. But, what did General Haxo know? "There will be an investigation, as a matter of form," I replied. "It being a fair duel, I suppose Radzivill's death will not be followed up very severely, as he forced the quarrel. He was an object of aversion. Duels are only allowed here to pass easily by between officers. They are held to support their honor. With civilians, there is little sympathy. The police are watching the house now," said I. "I suppose they want to know where Serge is!" Alas! I had forgotten that he would merely be arrested on his parole of honor, pending an inquiry. I was hoodwinked. "Let us go to our rooms," replied Hermione, who now felt the heavy burden of the waiting ordeal of the morrow. Or, would Haxo linger! We had not long to wait. Alas! there was the last turn of the screw awaiting us in a new torture.

General Zastrow had skillfully persuaded Madame la Comtesse Komaroff and her lovely child to the belief that the Captain had been ordered on some special secret duty. He cheerily said, "You will hear from him tomorrow! It will not delay your departure beyond one extra day!" Sallying forth to reconnoitre, he was not stopped on going out. So I breathed freer; for, perhaps, the police watch was only a formal show to effect Captain Zastrow's technical arrest. The old General wished, naturally, to avoid all publicity. He would, of course, appeal to the Emperor for his cousin's pardon at once. The duel was a deliberately forced one. As to Zastrow fighting, it was a case of "noblesse oblige," and the honor of the navy. The unlucky opera party at last broke up. Trepoff whispered to me meaningly, "Come up to my room by and by. I want to talk to you. I want to avoid spies and the servants." I promised to do so; and before regaining our quarters, also, I agreed to have an early conference with the General and Trepoff in the library in the morning. "You see," whispered Dimitri, "the Dauvray may watch you,—she has no reason to hate me. I have always been kind to her."

When the weary maid had left Hermione, I tapped at her door,—the privileges of a "brother," a true "brother," in misery!

"Come in," she cried, and I glanced up and down the hall. No one in sight, I entered. She was seated by the window, gazing out on the blue Neva, with its thousand mirrored stars. I had warned her again about looking over her luggage, fearing always the French fiend's treachery. I was expectant of some further meddling. I told her of my councils with the two gentlemen. "Certainly, the house will be guarded until Captain Zastrow has been found. I think it is only a formality," she hopefully said. As she rested there in her furred gown, her slender hands clasped, and the fair head leaning back on the cushions, I said quietly, "Hermione! do you remember Arline Lazienka?" It was the dead spy's question. There was a world of tender pleading, a woman's last appeal for confidence, as she steadily said, in a low tone, turning her eyes to mine, as she held out the blue-veined

jeweled hand which had delivered the fatal ciphers. "Ah! yes! I do—I do! They called her once, in happier days than these, the Queen of the Forget-Me-Nots; but so long ago, the sad story is lost to me now!"—and her words ended in a sob. I would not press my victory. I said no more, for a thrill of heart break was in her voice. I softly closed my door, with a kindly "Good night." I pressed her hands. "To the death!" I murmured. I knew at last all the menacing bitterness of Radzivill's sneer. He could have opened the gates of the past. Oh! to be over that fatal Russian border!

With the dead man lying unburied, watched by menials, deserted by his friends, I still thanked God for the mercy of the fortunate accident which sent the ball from Serge's pistol crashing through that cowardly devil's head. Haxo was foiled! For, be Hermione now what folly had made her, she was yet a woman, and her beauty, her love, her life, was sacred to herself, and not rightly the spoil of the official rouse. Trepoff told me all of the conflict as we smoked in his room when I joined him. They arrived at half-past eleven at the Riding hall, for Radzivill was madly impatient for his revenge. Entrance to the practice gallery was easy for the four aristocrats, to whom an enlisted man dared deny nothing. An army surgeon had been hastily summoned from the club, on agreement of the seconds. No one suspected the deadly errand. But he well knew it was, as usual, some woman's hand behind the two pistols. The old, old story—men do not fight for money; they only gamble for it. The parties had stiffly bowed on meeting. The two principals remained sternly mute, face to face; and a couple of plain gray cavalry jackets gave them an equality in dress. Serge Zastrow fixed his steady eye on Radzivill as Dimitri pressed his hand in an agonizing farewell of brotherhood. "If we go, we go together," slowly said Zastrow, "for, I know I shall strike him fair between the eyes. He shoots low." The pistols in preparation, Trepoff tossed up for choice of weapons and the word, which last fell to Captain Obransky, Radzivill's second. Dimitri had quietly said to Obransky, as he took up an extra pistol before them all, "I don't wish to doubt you, Cap-

tain, but see that your man fires this time strictly on the word. If he should anticipate one hair, I will put a ball through his head! I mean what I say. Remember Oborski." Radzivill started—as an echo of Trepoff's voice reached him. He knew too well the subject of that conference; for Dimitri's face told the story. The Captain bowed in silence. The old scandal was too well known, and Trepoff's nerve was renowned. No man dared to quarrel on that past record; besides, the second was a loyal gentleman.

A last formal appeal to each of the principals was answered by each with a cold bow. Silently both took their places. Dimitri Trepoff stood—like a lion at bay—glaring at "the man who shot too quick." His heart followed the one, two,—and, at the word "Three," both the pistols rang out together. Radzivill pitched up in the air, without a single groan; then, crashing down like a falling tree! Serge Zastrow had kept his word; for his measuring eye had broken the renegade's nerve at last. Serge himself was thrown down by the shock of a ball. The surgeon, springing to him, noted the instant he opened the vest, from the bloodflow, that Zastrow's lungs were not pierced; for there was no jet—it only flowed! Ah! those lucky ribs of elastic resistance. The ball had glanced. The old doctor paid a brief visit of inspection to Radzivill's corpse, for the handkerchief spread over its face by his second already told the story. "Raide mort!" he cried. This recital of Trepoff's ended, "Where is Serge?" I said. "Hidden at the Yacht club for the night!" was the answer. We agreed on the use of the whole Zastrow, Komaroff, and Mouravieff influence to smother the matter. Serge could be brought home in the morning. I breathed freely, for I saw even Trepoff did not yet know the real cause of the duel!

Loyal Zastrow! He deserved to win his own spirited darling! "Loyal en tout." And so, we were now probably free to leave Russia unchallenged. For the police presence was only a formal precaution. Yet, over me, as I laid my weary limbs to rest, was the hostile specter of General Haxo,—and in my dreams I saw Félise Dau-



vray pointing to the gloomy fortress beyond the Neva! For, from a prison window, I seemed to see Hermione a prisoner, dragged along between exultant guards! A night of weird visions!

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SWORD FALLS! THE FALCON CAGED.

Clanging bells awoke me early from a troubled sleep! The double windows were thick with crusted snow,—outside a fleece of feathery flakes were falling silently—rapidly! The day was blue and dark! Yet it was a day of days to me! Our last day in St. Petersburg! For, the outward voyage was now safe!

I was stirring betimes. Our situation called for the most decided action,—the coolest wisdom. It was necessary to leave that night! Serge, too, would be brought home soon. Further social display was impossible. I must say adieu to him here. To search and prepare my luggage,—to have a final interview with my lawyer associates,—and to depart quietly: after sending Trepoff to Count Mouravieff to acquaint him with all the details of the trouble was my rapidly-formed plan. And, to have Serge secretly post his little patrician fiancée as to the necessity for extra help now—and added caution. For he could not go. The powerful nobleman Mouravieff would at once smooth all matters for Serge. With General Komaroff, he could cover me himself with the shadow of his wing till safe over the frontier! For Vera—bright darling—would be our guardian angel. Perhaps even go to the frontier herself. Hermione was still sleeping. I rang for coffee, and then sent a note down to General Zastrow to ask as to the police watch outside. I searched every piece of my baggage to see if anything had been disturbed. All was in perfect order. The Dauvray had not meddled with me. Even Durand had concluded I was no longer a star performer. All was in or-

der! Had the game been played out when Radzivill died? The man returned with this note from my host:

“Trepoff has gone away to bring Serge, if he can be safely moved. The police have all disappeared, save one or two agents on mere observation. Keep in your rooms till I send,—for I must appear to ignore this. Prepare all for your own departure to-night. Let your sister be ready early, too. I will come to you. I will see the Komaroff ladies; all is quieting down. I hope for the best. These duels are very soon forgotten here,—and, after all, Radzivill was a man of very cloudy record.

“M. Z.

This was certainly cheering! We might slip away unnoticed! My “sister” would be quite safe when once at Warsaw under the protection of General Komaroff. As soon as Hermione was off my hands, I would telegraph to Vienna to my waiting dear one, Madeleine. The whole circle had quietly accepted Hermione with open hearts as of my blood. Our quiet departure was the key to the whole situation! For all was forgotten in the general sympathy for Captain Zastrow. In a short time I heard the maid moving in Hermione’s room.

As soon as the coffee tray had been brought in, then I knocked at the door. The halls were silent, and I could hear little Olga pounding away at her interminable scales on the piano. I knew Félise Dauvray was tied down there. My troublesome charge was all ready for my last directions. She, too, agreed in the advisability of all my plans! She was cautioned to make no careless remark to arouse the last suspicions of the Komaroffs, Madame Zastrow,—or to revive, by any slip, the lost Queen of Forget-Me-Nots.

This unforeseen circumstance of the duel was enough to warrant our instant departure in the general family interest. It was a relief to all. I would inform them that I proposed to have Justine leave Russia as soon as the season opened and visit us abroad,—for a time! Business at the Department could wait its own grinding out now. My work was done. The evident suspicion in which our

whole circle would be involved, justified any abruptness. For the quarrel at the opera must not be investigated. I might be a witness.

Only when across the border could I cut the fatal ties which now bound up my honor and safety. The interests of all the Zastrows, and the peace of mind of my own dear ones were involved with Hermione's impending fate! It was truly "one for all—and—all for one!"

Hermione, with the help of her maid, was packing up all her many trunks and all her private belongings. I told her not to leave a single scrap of paper in her boxes. "Then we will have no trouble," I said. I feared only papers! I returned to my room and busied myself in directing my man in my arrangements for leaving. It was a welcome task! From the windows, I could only see half-way across the mighty Neva, now a mingled mass of floating, rotten ice and dark, chilling waters! The navigation was all stopped. The winter was locking all up! The strongly-anchored boat bridge, too, would soon be swung to the banks for the winter. And, that ephemeral "Devil's Auction" be thrown open on the solid ice floor. A large sleigh drew up before the door, then followed a smaller one! I gazed with a deep interest! Oh! To spring down the stairs and welcome him! I dared not! It was Serge and his party. Reclining on a mattress and enveloped in fur robes, he had been moved quite easily! One victory! To stay at the Yacht Club would, of course, set every tongue in the town smoothly wagging! No journalistic reference would be made in this town of repression. Our spreading any conjectures and rumors would also be dangerous to us all! Silence was golden here! I saw him carefully carried, lying on his couch, by four stout servants, up the stairs! And, so he was safe—on his own ground—near Vera! Dimitri and a friend also entered,—undoubtedly the army surgeon. I could fancy Vera Komaroff's sweet face leaning over him! Her gallant lover! The sleighs drove quietly away! So this was done in peace! And—the police had ignored all. No arrest—no visit! I could not restrain my impatience. I counted the minutes till I thought I could send to General Zastrow! For, I wished to share

in this triumph—to grasp Serge Zastrow's avenging hand! A knock at my door! The genial Trepoff entered, saying:

"Grahame!—come with me; but don't excite Serge. Just see him a moment, and then send your sister down. You can say good-bye to Zastrow this afternoon. He is all right, but weak! For, Vera must see him, too! You know what that means!"—he smiled.

We descended to the first floor: there, in every temporary comfort, our hero was extended in a huge canopied bed. The surgeon sat quietly watching by him. The wounded man was in excellent condition, though still pale from loss of blood. He spoke cheerily, and said, as I sprang to his side:

"Well, old fellow! you see I am all right! It was a close call! He meant I should go, too! The bone department saved me; for he was a close shot!"

The physician lifted his warning finger. Long discussions were out of order here! I grasped his hand. My eyes thanked him for his noble self-devotion. He understood all, and smiled significantly, as he looked unutterable things!

"Send your sister to see me now," said Serge. "I want to talk to her a moment before Vera comes in. Come yourself and see me this afternoon again. I'll see all is fixed as you wish!"

I understood the glance of his eyes, and retired on a significant hint from the "Medicus." He wanted no fever to be encouraged,—and the coming visit of the bright-eyed Vera was a strong incentive to a spasm of Love's fever!

I sent Hermione down, as I knew Serge wished to understand all her womanly views of such things,—and to have her bring Vera to him! They would arrange some consistent story so as not to alarm his love unnecessarily! The dear little reward of love's loyalty! It was evident General Zastrow and Trepoff knew nothing at all of the real root of the quarrel—a blessing to us! Radzivil's lips were sealed now in death! A crowning mercy. The right man in the right place! Serge saw at a glance that my silence was assured. My own safety insured that

one prudence. The delicate point was now sweet Vera, who must not have her own coming bridal clouded by any "*arrière pensée*!" No social scandal must blight the myrtle. With Vera and the Countess to aid, the Warsaw General and Count Mouravieff could easily stifle any flying rumors. And,—society forgets so soon! I joined Trepoff and the General in the library, where we talked matters over briefly. There was nothing to indicate any future trouble. Both gentlemen approved of my hastened departure, and also offered me every aid. The good Trepoff (my *Deus ex machina*), would go down to the station with us,—thus keeping the Zastrow family, directly, out of the imbroglio! And, Love's compact was secretly sealed between Hermione and the man who only lived to keep the wedding tryst at Brussels! I gave Trepoff a draft for a round sum. He kindly departed for the bank to bring me English notes and French gold. It was agreed we should not leave the house, save to go to the station. I watched him go with a sigh. "I wonder if Love—any woman's love—will repay him for his forfeited career. For, he can not marry her and remain in the service of the Czar! Not unless the dead past is buried forever!" Trepoff would send a messenger and retain a stateroom on the train for Warsaw direct, as the Moscow stay was given up. We only sought to get over the frontier as soon as possible. A messenger had brought me the letters from Count Mouravieff to General Gourko—also, a private one (sealed), for Vera's father. There was a brief penciled note to me from the wise Moravieff with his own sage injunctions:

"I know the fatal result of the duel! Leave here at once—to-day if possible. I will watch over your friends here. Serge will be fully protected. If you are troubled on the trip, dispatch to me; I will then telegraph Gourko and Galitzin my private advice. Bon voyage. Our regards to Madame. Use my name anywhere. Captain Zastrow acted with great spirit! Tell him so!

"Nicolas Mouravieff."

I was touched at this kindly help from the great noble. Truly, the old Russian families are like those loyal "Three Guardsmen,"—"one for all and all for one!" But, for the dark shadow of the police, still brooding over the social horizon, family life in Russia would be the most delightfully hospitable and patriarchal in the world,—and a model for our more utilitarian and egotistic western nations! We who "know it all" in our own ignorance! Alas! the innocent always suffer for the guilty: a haunting unrest pervades the conservative, educated, highly-placed Muscovite circles whose natural devotion and loyalty would be the richest circlet of jewels in the Russian crown! It is not in the mind of the raw Western Republican to apply remedies to Russian affairs! We need our medicine sadly at home!

The progress of this gifted nation is retarded by dragging along thousands of discontented peasants innocently born in ignorance and then nursed in a stupid fear of progress. They are only the pawns of Misery, while—the "mouchard" is the curse of Russia! as of every other land where a uniform makes a brute, the master of the toiler.

General Zastrow told me he had informed his wife and Madame Komaroff of the entire facts, leaving Serge and Hermione to give Vera the easiest version to be devised by them. In this way, the family peace would be guaranteed. I retired to my room after a stay of half an hour. The family assembled at breakfast on Trepoff's return. Only six hours more! Hermione had met me in the hall, with eyes filled with grateful tears, as she pressed my hand, saying:

"He has arranged all for our safety. Ah! Serge—God bless him!—is a true and noble heart! He has saved my future as well as my life here! For, he slew the one man I feared in the whole world! I am safe now."

No reference was made to the tragedy by us at the table. It was a final feast of friendly cordiality—and—our last one! Lovely Vera was silent, and thankfully musing over the safety of her lover. Innocent egotism of her devoted heart! But, her bright eye told me that she was our guardian angel, vowed now for the voyage.

Our departure was talked over freely, as General Zastrow's household rules excluded the governess and Professor Grimm from the morning table! The young heiress spent the early day at the school-room and temporary musical academy: while the little girl's quieter hours were devoted to the governess and her languages. At dinner was the family dress parade. Madame Komaroff decided gladly to return, at once, to her Warsaw home, after breakfast, leaving the anxious Vera to pack up and spend an hour with her gallant lover; by whose side one of the Sisters of Charity was already installed. He was now sleeping and the surgeon had gone. "He won't wake up for a few hours," the doctor smiled,—and,—he knew.

The Sisters of Charity of the Greek church are the self-constituted guardians of all sufferers, high and low. They are angels of modest and unobtrusive goodness! So Serge was in the safest and kindest hands. The aspiring and intelligent, active-minded young Russian women would reach a plane of far higher moral activity by joining these devoted ranks of the sisterhoods, instead of conspiring for the overthrow of the slowly-developing national social system! Though faulty, it is worlds better than the wholesale wreck of Socialism! Half-education leads always to conspiracy and social ruin! To a thousand weaknesses; and hasty education is the curse of our own free Republic! It sows its dragon's teeth! Our meal was soon ended. Much lay before us all. We said "adieu" to the good, motherly Madame Zastrow, who embraced Hermione with fond affection, insisting that "au revoir" was her only greeting.

"You must come to us again," she said. "There are warm hearts on the Neva!"

I was perfectly satisfied with the temperature of a Quaker girl's heart far away on the Schuylkill. These sympathetic natures had been drawn close together by the budding love which bound Vera to our kinsman Serge, and by Hermione's complete conquest of little Olga Zastrow.

We retired to our last preparations. My sister was still busied with her maid. Vera had joined in the watch over

her lover in a tender devotion! It was a labor of love! It was now noon,—a dark, cheerless, bitter day. Was this our last in St. Petersburg? I had begged Hermione to watch her rooms every moment! Where was the faithful Durand? Was it prudence which kept her away? I had finished my preparations and was now smoking a composing cigar, while musing over the long and dangerous journey before me! Would we run the gauntlet in safety? I could hardly wait the signal to leave. Every step was truly surrounded with peril, but yet Mouravieff's powerful help was to me a talismanic safeguard.

I was suddenly awakened from my reverie by my man, who faltered, with wildly-staring eyes, "Would Monsieur kindly join the 'Barin' in the salon, at once, if possible."

"Instantly—if you please!" I saw a strange look on the man's face. What new jack-in-the-box had popped out? Another delay? I descended the stairway with a kindly word to encourage Hermione when I passed through her room. "There is some sudden business," I said. And as I left, she stood, her hands clasped on her frightened bosom.

"Business!" she echoed. What was wanted now? I supposed the police were, perhaps, making a formal visit regarding the duel. I might be detained—perhaps a day or so, as a witness! And yet, I knew my rôle! I had my secret orders! Calmness! Silence! Prudence! I walked into the bright salon, with a perfectly unmoved face, as the man timidly opened the door. General Zastrow and his wife were standing side by side,—their faces showed the gravest concern,—and, a puzzled expression which at once alarmed me. Beside them, was the menacing presence of General Haxo. He smiled at me in his calm and inscrutable way. He did not even salute me! It was an official visit! And—why? I heard a quick, joyful cry,—then—half turning my head—I was clasped in my sister Madeleine's arms! She lovingly kissed me between smiles and tears! I rubbed my eyes.

"Where did you come from? How did you get here?" I murmured, as she started back in surprise. I was thunderstruck—speechless! This was the fall of the sword! I was silent. My tongue was paralyzed—and all gazed at



me. What devil's work was this? I was rooted to the spot!

Beautiful, beaming with love and highest happiness, Madeleine was a touching figure in her girlish beauty,—and, turning her eyes in wonder from stranger to stranger,—no lovelier girl ever gladdened a happy American's home. Her turban and her traveling furs lay on a chair! Evidently she had just arrived. But,—how? What brought her? The scene was burned into my brain! And, all seemed to wait for me to speak. A cloud came into Madeleine's eyes. I gasped an incoherent welcome;—all eyes were fixed on me. The old General stood there amazed! And, a dark frown gathered on his soldierly face! He began to understand—too well for my peace of mind.

"And, you never told me Justine was here!" was the next utterance of the overjoyed girl, who was now radiant with happiness. "Where is she? I see—you wished to surprise me!"

Now! the wretched truth flashed on my mind! I was duped, tricked,—and Hermione was lost! Fear—simple, abject fear tied my tongue! But—I could warn her—the beautiful mystery!

I moved toward the door. Could I reach Hermione she might escape to Durand's hidden shelter! One chance remained open. General Haxo planted himself firmly before the door. I paused. Safety was impossible. It only remained to be mute—and suffer—in silence.

Turning, with a mocking sneer, he said to General Zastrow: "Will you conduct Mademoiselle Grahame here instantly?" in a cutting tone of imperious mandate. The old General approached the door.

"Certainly," he said. "She will be glad to see her sister, I am sure." I groaned.

"Stay!" said Haxo. "Send for her!" Mouchard caution. And now, I knew why the police had guarded the house. It was to net us! General Zastrow rang the bell. His wife looked as if the ground were sinking under her. She knew that some dire stroke was impending! The butler appeared, and other servants had flocked into the hall.

"Ask Mademoiselle Grahame to kindly join us in the parlor instantly; it is very important!" said the head of the family, fixing his eyes on me in one glance of reproachful, agonized wonder. My young sister, tired with travel, was still startled at such a welcome. Madeleine looked from one to the other. Her American spirit rose up.

"Why! brother Walter! is my sister sick? What has happened? Why did you send this gentleman to meet me? Why did you not come? They said you were sick. It was some mistake—the dispatch. But you must thank him for all his kindness," said she, gratefully smiling at General Haxo. "And—his friend, Colonel Luboff, was so kind. He told me all about you!" The clock in the hall ticked on in a dead silence. My speech was paralyzed now, for down the stairs came Hermione's light foot, and then she swept into the parlor, with unconscious grace! There was a bright smile on her face—an expectant smile—which froze into marble!

One glance told all! We were betrayed and lost! At the door behind her suddenly appeared two black forms!

"Who is this lady? Where is my own sister?" faltered the now frightened girl. Madeleine cried:

"Walter, what does this all mean?"

General Zastrow started forward, as Haxo raised his warning finger in command. Madeleine shrieked in terror—for the two sentinels sprang on Hermione, whose right hand was neatly seized by the chief, as he twisted a little vial out of her grasp. So, her forfeited life was saved for his future torment!

"Secure her!" he hissed, and a wintry smile played on his face. "I will take charge of this lady's personal safety!" he leered.

Madeleine fell sobbing on a chair. Old General Zastrow turned on me like a lion in rage.

"Where is my sister? My God! brother! can you not speak?" she wailed. "What have you brought me into? What a horrible den!" The old hostess glided to her side.

"Fear nothing, my dear child," cried the venerable Russian patrician. "You are safe! You have done no wrong! My poor girl! My poor girl!" she murmured,

—and then the hostess turned a glance on me which made me shiver in shame.

“Will you explain this?” cried General Zastrow, as he sprang forward,—then gripping my hand like steel! The old man was all life now. The honor of his house was at stake!

I was silent,—for one glance of unutterable beseeching supplication beamed from Hermione’s eyes. I thought of Trepoff’s heart—soon to be broken—and—his life!—now in peril! She stood proudly calm, with a secret agent holding firmly each wrist. The falcon was caught at last! Was Trepoff involved; or Serge? I might still save her life by my silence!

“Let the burden fall on my shoulders alone!” I said. I could not find other words to answer. My eyes roved from my sobbing sister to the lovely Hermione,—an embodiment of utter despair in her cold beauty! Her pale face had the lines of an avenging goddess!

“How in God’s name did Madeleine come here?” I mused, as my very brain seemed to rack and split. “Whose work was all this?”

“Perhaps I can solve this riddle!” sneered the General. He stepped to the front door. General Zastrow sat down, entirely unnerved. This was a disgrace to his proud family name. With Haxo, soon returned a young officer of a line regiment. “Captain,” said the now triumphant Haxo, “you will permit no one to enter or leave this room till my return.” There were two birds in his net now. His eyes gleamed in cunning triumph.

“Michael Alexandrovitch, I do this only in consideration for your family and this innocent young American lady! On your peril, be it as I have ordered. I hold you responsible, ‘in the name of the Czar!’” General Zastrow gravely bowed.

I watched Haxo leave with a look of malignant satisfaction in his cold eyes, as he scowled at Hermione. “I have already sent my own valet to warn Trepoff,” whispered the General, “and, he will plead with the Grand Duke Michael. There is some mistake!” Hermione had seated herself, silent and sternly watchful. At her side stood the two rough men. They were respectable-look-

ing men of the lower classes. The young military officer leaned on his sword at the open door, with his keen eye waiting the slightest move. It was a strange scene,—in a great salon. No external stir denoted this drama within the house. Merry jingling sleigh-bells rang gayly out, as the revelers joyously glided by. The outside world ran along on its mad career of gayety! And—this was a Russian interior! General Zastrow and his wife busied themselves with Madeleine, who was afraid to approach me. Hermione fixed her blazing eyes silently on me! I read in their bright flashes the high pride of a spirited, self-devoted woman. But what prompted her attempt?

“Silence à la mort,” was her resolution! The martyr light was shining even now on her brow. I could not look away from her! And, she would die with her secrets in that unpolluted breast! Ah! God!—what awaited her? What could impel such a woman to madly wreck all around her? Was our “good-bye” to be forever? To part at the prison door—she bound for the scaffold? I thought with useless sympathy, that events beyond our control had pushed her into the fatal tableau where we two were now the central figures! I was driven like a leaf before the storm. And she,—the victim of a foolish self-devotion! What was the last stroke of the mute chief? God alone knew! My brain whirled! We were not kept long in suspense! I was convinced in my heaviest of human hearts, that Hermione had never looked forward to such a wholesale family ruin wrought around her here now! No! Serge Zastrow’s cunning plan had failed on the very eve of success!

A sleigh stopped before our doors. The bustle of descending travelers was heard! Who was coming to gaze on our now public shame? In a moment, the chief re-entered the salon. Following him was the gigantic Colonel Luboff, and on his arm a veiled lady, who quickly threw one startled glance around, and cried, “My own sister!” as Madeleine sprang into her arms, with a glad welcome, “Justine!” The weeping girl buried her face in the bosom of my dear matronly Russianized sister. I hung my head. Justine here! Now, my shame was complete! Springing to my side in a moment, as the old General

took Madeleine to a chair, my own loyal Justine said, as she grasped my cold hand:

"My God! Walter! My own brother! Are you really better? What does all this mean? Why are these policemen here?" She saw Hermione at bay there!

"It means," said Haxo,—and the mocking voice distilled slowly, each a drop of poison, "that this beautiful lady has been masquerading here as Walter Grahame's sister Madeleine. Who is she? Do you know, Madame Justine Zastrow?" His finger pointed at Hermione, who sat mute, gazing with a pitying glance on my poor Madeleine, who looked around in questioning uncertainty. For the terrified girl's debut in Petersburg society was not of a happy nature! "Do you know her, Mademoiselle?" said the police General, not unkindly, speaking to Madeleine.

"I never saw her in my life!" cried the girl who had come from Paris to nurse me, as she threw her arms around my neck, in a storm of sorrow! "Oh! Walter! Walter!" she cried, "what is all this? Did you do this? Tell me it is not true, Walter! Why did you telegraph to me that you were sick?"—she clung to me, while gazing at her weeping sister Justine, who, a matron, used to the wiles of Russian society now, blushed to see me caught in a disgraceful intrigue.

"I never did!" I slowly faltered, as I felt my dear sister tremble, while her tearful eyes sought the truth in mine.

"Why, I received several telegrams from you! Who sent them, then?" she demanded. I could not trust another syllable! A human life, perhaps, hung on each word. Hermione was a woman,—and,—friendless! It was her life in danger! General Zastrow broke the silence, as Haxo gazed with pride on his work! He had cornered me so that I must either disgrace or criminate myself.

"You brought this lady to my house, sir, as your sister Madeleine!" said he, with fiery eyes. "You imposed on Serge and Trepoff with this story, too!" My heart leaped up in a secret joy. They were safe, at least. My dear ward gave one gasp, and then fell prone at my feet,—the girlish eyes closed in a deadly swoon. She knew me for

a shameless social traitor—and—I had used her own innocent name! I grasped her, but General Zastrow, his wife and Justine alone assisted to raise her, with the respectful aid of Haxo. She was soon lying sobbing there before me, her face buried in her hands. I would have sprung to her side in aid. I was powerless to help, for a heavy hand was on my arm. The silent officer said, at a glance from Haxo, "In the name of the Czar,—remain here! You are under arrest." At last! The bolt had fallen—and—I was a prisoner, as well as a disgraced man. "General Zastrow," coldly said the chief, "I am not going to impeach your loyalty further than simply to search the rooms of these two persons. That is my official duty." The old General's breast heaved in a mighty, silent throb of shame. "Will you accompany Colonel Luboff as he seals all the baggage and places guards in the rooms I refer to? I will remain here." Michael Zastrow stepped forward to leave the room, his good, gray head bowed.

"One moment before you go," continued the implacable Haxo. "I desire to say that Madame Zastrow and her real sister Miss Madeleine are free, in every sense of the word—and worthy of your kindest hospitality. They must not blame me in this painful matter. It was forced on me! I am instructed to afford them every official courtesy, and your own house must be their home. It is due to them as innocent; and I shall make my duty—a private—nay, a confidential matter—as ordered! Favor me by returning when the rooms are sealed. I will await you,"—and he seated himself, as General Zastrow bowed in a dignified silence. The old host and the silent Luboff left the room together. Luboff's eyes rested, not unkindly, on Hermione's marble face, as he clanked away up the stairs. The sobs of my sister alone broke the ghastly silence! The "household gods" lay shivered all around us! And, I had brought shame and disgrace on the two women I loved, and shaded the family name in vain.

"Can I remove Miss Grahame?" timidly said the sweet and sympathetic hostess, whose gentle heart turned kindly to all suffering. She was in a terror of her own,

Police under the roof of the Zastrows! A search! What ignominy!

"In a few moments, Madame; as soon as the gentlemen return. You may go yourself where you will if you wish for anything." The good lady fled from the room,—and returned in a few moments with various restoratives and temporary comforts for my dear sister. She was followed by the calm Félise Dauvray, whose great gray eyes gleamed yellow as she looked at Hermione now with a triumphant stare.

The fainting spell was over. Madeleine began to revive; but, feebly attempting to speak, her voice failed her. She sank back again in silent exhaustion! Her début in Russian "high society" had been too much for her! Cut down by the sudden shock, it had broken her nerve utterly. I vainly essayed to speak! The officer restrained me, with a very significant pressure! I dared not disobey. For, I might then be torn away at once. The "Dauvray" woman left the room on some trifling errand. I could easily divine her real purpose. She had now an excuse to force herself into Serge's sick room and gloat over Vera's agonies! Or—would she have another colloquy with Luboff? But, I could not stop her! It was true, my first guess,—for Vera came slowly to the door and glanced in timidly. There was an agony on her face, which I really pitied, even in my peril. Was Serge also a prisoner? Who could tell what would happen in this fated house? The General arose, with hideous politeness. He said:

"The Countess Komaroff is always welcome! Pray enter!"—and he hastened to hand a chair—a really perfect squire of dames.

Seeing two strange faces and the unusual array, she was recoiling, as old Madame Zastrow stepped forward, leading her to my sick sister's couch. Vera seated herself, and a few whispered words passed between the hostess, Vera and the dear girl lying helpless there!

I could well define the burden of these hurried disclosures: for Vera slowly turned her head and gazed anxiously at Hermione! I riveted my eyes upon her as she glanced at the beautiful woman, now a prisoner! It was

a crucial moment! The little Countess met the eyes of my Pandora with a wondering, anxious inquiry. There was a world of tender sorrow in the mute message of the girl's eyes. Hermione was silent, but her swimming glances seemed to say, as she sat, in the proud dignity of her watchful silence: "Think of me at my best, dear, innocent child!" There must have been a subtle freemasonry of spirit between their natures, for I could read a forgiveness in Vera's kindling glance! For she madly loved her Serge,—and well she knew that Dimitri Trepoff adored the woman sitting there in shame! "I will never abandon you in sorrow and sadness;—you may count on me to the last!" Such was the flashing signal of the brave little patrician. Hermione sighed softly as the fall of the snowflake. A spirit seemed to hover over her noble and pallid face. And, there—a helpless pawn—a prisoner—I sat, ignorant of the language of my keepers! The footman came to the door, which had been closed.

"Major Dimitri Trepoff!" he announced.

Dimitri, kindly and eager, bustled into the room! He had closed up all his business and ordered train accommodations. And, here he burst in upon a scene which chilled his very marrow! He knew it was our ruin! His quick eye and long service in the Ministry of the Interior told him the most serious trouble had occurred! His eye roved from face to face, and a mask of professional caution alone sealed his lips! For,—all our hopes were now centered in his nerve and coolness!

"Pray be seated, Major Trepoff," said General Haxo. "I will need you,—sir,—as a witness in the examination of the luggage of these persons (carelessly indicating Hermione and myself). Then, Haxo did not suspect Trepoff—or—did he mean to let him betray himself later?

Trepoff sat down and exchanged glances with us. To me, his steady, friendly message was, "Silence! I am studying all! Wait!" Poor Hermione he eyed as one looks on the victim robed for the sacrifice! He knew Russian justice! And, stifling his love, he bowed in a mute obedience to Haxo's request.

Colonel Luboff and General Zastrow returned! Trepoff silently pressed Constantine's hand! There was not



a word exchanged! For, this story told itself! The fatal moment was now approaching. Luboff reported in a low tone to General Haxo, as Trepoff sprang across the room, and with Justine was busied at the side of the woman who had come from Paris to ruin us all in innocence! The chief mused a moment. He spoke then, gravely:

"Michael Alexandrovitch," said he, "I will draw down no scandal on your house! I shall remove this unknown lady to the fortress at once! In deference to your distinguished family, she will be taken quietly! I shall place no public guard over your honored home! The American gentleman may remain in his room here under guard, and I charge Major Trepoff on honor with his keeping until I can report to higher authority for further orders in this very painful case! He is not to enter any other room in the house an instant, save to be present at the examination of this person's baggage." He spoke with a cold glance at the unmoved Hermione, "with which duty I also charge Major Trepoff, as well as a report on the personal goods of Monsieur! I request you to be present at each examination, which will be forthwith. Colonel Luboff will represent me! You, as a legal householder, General, are responsible for all,—now,—and I must exact that not one word be exchanged between any members of either family and this gentleman, Mr. Grahame. Major Trepoff alone will communicate with and for him! All papers, letters and telegrams for either of the culprits are to be held by Major Trepoff!" (Trepoff bowed.) Haxo joyed secretly to make him the instrument of a private vengeance. He glibly concluded: "The two ladies who have a right to be here, are to have every freedom which the greatest courtesy can extend. I am officially responsible for their identity. I recommend them to seek your advice in all matters." I saw the veins swelling on Trepoff's forehead like whipcord!—and—his eyes—his sad eyes gleamed as he gazed at Hermione! "I shall return and give my orders this evening as to the future detention of Monsieur!" The general silence was now oppressive.

"Colonel!" said General Haxo to Luboff, "you will deliver your prisoner at once to the commandant of the

fortress, who has received orders already in her case!" So, the toils had been set for days! My friend Dimitri fixed his eyes on me in a glance which said, "And, next—Serge and I go to join you!"

"Captain," said Haxo, in conclusion, as we all waited upon each syllable of the malignant military tyrant;—the ladies cowered together;—the young officer saluted, and stood at his chief's side in readiness; "you will report to Major Trepoff and then, follow his orders! Your commission is responsible for your duty! You will not separate an instant from this gentleman until my return. Please order my sleigh!" "Ah! God!" I thought, "if Trepoff can only set our powerful friends at work there may be hope yet!"

The Captain sent one of the agents out, and in a few moments cool General Haxo descended the steps as if ending a polite call only, saying as he left the room:

"Colonel Luboff, it is now two o'clock! I will return at eight this evening. Return here when you have delivered your suspect, and then await me. Major Trepoff may select a woman servant to stay with the prisoner until her examination is over. She may take the proper baggage over to her on his order after the examination. The woman must not leave the fortress, though, after entering. I make these concessions from respect to General Zastrow, and to avoid public disgrace for him. You may now permit these ladies to retire, Colonel!" Luboff bowed.

"A woman to go with her!" I thought. "Ah! then he is not so sure yet of his prey! For he may fear the Mouravieffs—the Komaroffs—the Zastrows!"

The chief saluted the family circle. His sleigh was soon bearing him, on the wings of the wind, to a secret conference with the Minister of the Interior, and further consideration of this strange case. For, no one yet knew why or wherefore the beautiful hunted fugitive had been seized. Nor my poor self! Though dazed, I thought it was remarkable he had not even hinted at the fatal duel! And, Serge Zastrow seemed to be unscathed by this official cyclone. I imagined he did not care to unnecessarily array the three great patrician allied families against him—

self, on account of the dead Radzivill. For that energetic gentleman's game was played out! War was on Hermione! Had the issue of the duel disarranged his plans? Probably so! But,—what was his present hold on her? Where was his warrant? Alas! I knew that he was sure of his stroke! I thanked Heaven for Serge's well-aimed shot. There was no direct proof as yet against her.

As soon as General Haxo was out of sight, Trepoff conferred with General Zastrow. The ladies assisted my suffering sister from the room. And, she would not even look in my direction. It was a spasm of girlish fear. She was taken through the second salon, with the assistance of the two other gentlemen. Feebly her eyes sought mine in a mute reproach, which cut me to the very heart! I would be prisoned in the same house for a night! How much longer? That depended on the Czar's will! And, what would become of us all? My accusing sister Justine turned and, striding back through the salon, said to me, in a bitter voice: "I never thought to see our family name dragged down to shame, Walter!" Her eyes flashed as she faced me there. "But you have broken my sister's heart!" Turning then, she followed Madeleine. I was alone now, indeed! For, I had violated the holy bond of affection,—and even old General Zastrow loathed me! Hermione's eyes shone pityingly on me, as my face showed the anguish in my heart! For, I had "gone in to win," and pledged even my family honor in vain;—and—now—I dared not justify myself! The beginning of the end had come. Colonel Luboff, the Captain, and the two guards were all in the room with us! Only in a strict silence was there safety for me! And,—I would never regain, perhaps, my liberty! Of what use was a good name now? The devilish Frenchwoman had also disappeared! She would send the news far and wide through St. Petersburg with malignant, sly adroitness. A low hireling's revenge! And—she had dragged Serge's friend down to shame! A real triumph! Major Trepoff and General Zastrow returned in a few moments. The latter was anxious to quiet his house. He wished to prevent the thousand-tongued scandals which might forfeit

him the favor of the Emperor, and the respect of society! He was silent save to remark to Colonel Luboff:

"I have sent for my own family physician. Please allow him to enter" He glared then sadly at me. His dishonorable guest! Colonel Luboff bowed his assent. He now gravely spoke to the young Captain in a low tone. There was "business" in his every accent—and I began to fear new developments. The young officer quickly disappeared. He dispatched a waiting messenger, for in a few moments, a double sleigh dashed up and stopped at the door! It was from the Place Razvodni. It awoke bitter memories in me of that fatal night!

"Madame," said Luboff, "I have now to perform my duty." Hermione looked out at the blinding storm, for the snowflakes were whirling down dismally. Her eye rested on the river, beyond which lay the dark fortress. I knew her wish. Death—before dishonor! I read it in her despairing eyes. Luboff's quick wit saw the mute prayer, and read it strangely.

"Major Trepoff, will you kindly have this lady's maid bring all this person's wraps and furs, with such other articles as you may think proper? You are in charge of her effects."

"Certainly," said Trepoff, who made a sign to General Zastrow, and they ascended the stair, followed by Vera Komaroff, who spoke in low tones to Hermione.

Silence, save for the ticking of the clock in the hall, as they left us. My eyes were fixed on the doomed woman. At the word "maid," uttered by Colonel Luboff, I saw her lips move. No sound! but they seemed to shape the word, "Marie Durand"—and, in one quick, fleeting glance of intelligence, I saw that Dimitri Trepoff understood the appeal. He had been standing bowed in a deep study, but I had noted his man leave the front door, as if on an ordinary errand. If I could only get the faithful Durand to join Hermione—would it be possible? How to communicate, though? Oh! for some one happy in inspiration! I dared not speak—for I was sternly watched. I met her gaze with a glance of comprehension. She seemed to say, "I trust all to Dimitri Trepoff now!" I could read that faith in her shining eyes. But how to get

Hermione's wishes! It was vital. I dared not try to speak to her. It would perhaps ruin us both. The gentlemen were on the stair, and bore the articles back themselves! Evidently the quick-witted Vera had been called in to select them. I waited in a trance of pain. Turban, wraps, fur and all the traveling articles, with a small portmanteau. No maid with them! Perhaps—if Trepoff only caught the idea! He smiled faintly at me. Did he understand? General Zastrow preferred to keep the shame of this departure out of the servants' eyes! This forced removal of a guest of the honored house to a malefactor's prison cell—a black day for the Zastrow name! The only shadow in two hundred years, rested on the noble name,—and it was through me! I bitterly cursed the day when I saw the frontier of icy Russia! Hermione addressed herself to Colonel Luboff, whose manner was apparently that of a man deeply moved. Her voice thrilled us all in its strange unearthly sweetness. It was the first syllable since she had been rudely seized:

"May I speak to Major Trepoff for one moment, sir?" I breathed in an agony of doubt.

"Certainly, Madame! but, only in my presence," was the reply of the former admirer of the Fair Unknown. He was also mindful of the Captain's presence.

"Major," said Hermione, very slowly, "I would not like to rob General Zastrow of any of his own tried house servants to go as my maid. I shall not need one long,—not, after my trial," she remarked simply. "I would like to send for my own sewing-woman, who also has a number of my garments, and to have her stay with me as long as possible!"

Trepoff gazed at Colonel Luboff, who nodded carelessly his approval. I felt my heart leap up in one throb of joyous hope. Durand!!!

"Certainly, Madame; if you will give me the address I will send for her to-night," said Trepoff, whose voice was cold and strange. "She can bring such things as you need." And his eyes met hers, in one fugitive glance,—as he continued: "I will then send her to the fortress with a pass to join you, but she must be personally searched on going and coming; and she will also have

to stay with you till your case is decided! Such are the rules!" He spoke calmly, yet I thought I could trace a lurking kindness in his tones! Was it only pity? Did Luboff suspect? Ah! No—he was busied with a little *affaire du coeur* of his own.

"Then I had better write her a note. May I?" said the helpless woman, who was going from a patrician home to a public prison, as she appealed to Colonel Luboff. The burly soldier gazed good-humoredly at the fair suppliant:

"I have no objection, if Major Trepoff takes the official responsibility,—and the note is open and brief," said the debonnair Luboff. His thoughts were far away,—for he regarded Hermione as an affair of the General's.

Paper and pencil were quickly brought. My cheeks burned; I bowed my head, as I feared I might betray myself by too keen an interest. I avoided Hermione's eyes. I thought for the first time, "What a reckoning I will meet in Philadelphia, for this volunteer folly, when my sisters even condemn me unheard!" She wrote briefly, as follows:

"Mme. Bredoff,

"1089 Italiansky Str.

"Send my sewing woman, Marie, to stay with me, as Major Trepoff will explain. I need my dresses in your hands, now. Keep all my other work in hand. Send me a trusty woman of your own selection, if mine is busy."

Colonel Luboff took the note, read it, and gave it to the Major. "Very good," said he; "you can send for the woman at once. She can get the needed articles ready, when you examine the luggage here. I will leave orders with the guard for your pass to admit the woman you send over."

Dimitri sent the note instantly, by one of the house servants, with directions to return at once with the woman. Colonel Luboff arose, donned his cloak, and took his sword and turban. The moment of our parting, perhaps forever, was at hand. "I will leave the guards here, Major," said he. General Zastrow arose, with agitation,

and silently left the room, without a word. He could not bear to see his mysterious guest taken away by the police. Silence hung like a pall over us; for the old man's sorrow shivered our hearts. It was a realization of the shame. The Captain and guards retired to the anteroom on a signal from the Sub-Chief. Trepoff stood there, mutely regarding the beautiful prisoner, her clasped hands trembling. But Hermione was ready. She had donned her furs and turban. Vera's thoughtfulness had provided a fleecy throat wrap and a heavy veil. A woman's gentle thought for another's helplessness! Bright and tender girl! She pitied her fallen sister, and I blessed her, even in my own gloomy sorrows. "May I say good-bye?" said Hermione appealingly to the colossal Colonel, indicating me, with a glance. I was on the rack. Luboff muttered, "Be brief! It is against my duty. Still—"—and he walked out of the room with a sign to Trepoff to remain. Oh! God! how to use these fleeting moments! The gallant Dimitri was suddenly interested in a picture at the far corner of the salon; and Hermione sprang to his side. It seemed an age to me before they had finished their colloquy, and I saw Dimitri's arms around her as he pledged his love and devotion to the last. And then she came swiftly to me. "He must recover himself! Luboff may suspect!" she quickly whispered, as she clasped my hand in hers. "Now, you will not be long in their keeping! Work with Serge and Trepoff! Silence to the end! Trust Durand or the woman sent! My note explains. We have friends even in the fortress. Don't attack Haxo at all! He knows little as yet. Work with Trepoff! Beg Vera to implore the Komaroffs and Mouravieffs to help, for Dimitri's sake! I will communicate in some way! No writing! Watch this Dauvray. She has spied on us! Appear always ignorant and talk to no one but Vera, Serge and Trepoff. I implore pardon of our hosts. May God bless your dear noble sisters! They will surely pardon you, when I am far away! Now!" (and, her arms closed once around my neck) "Good-bye! In life and death, your poor companion! Fate was against us both! I did not mean to ruin you all! My life may pay my,

debt! Don't forget me! Comfort Dimitri when I am gone! They may only send me away! You have been more than a brother to me!" And her burning lips pressed kisses on mine. A woman's last farewell! An honest woman's tenderest adieu! "We will save you, Hermione!" I cried. "I swear it! I will never leave your cause! Count on me to the very last!" I murmured. Trepoff turned. He quivered as he saw my eyes were blinded with bitter tears; and he was forced to play the indifferent now—for her life.

Hermione advanced proudly and with simple grace as Luboff re-entered the room. "Major," said she, in a broken voice, "I thank you for all your kind consideration to me." The huge Colonel was keenly eying them, and saw the broken-hearted Dimitri kissing her hand, in a cold silence. I felt now the Czar's iron gauntlet was closing to crush "the lovely Queen of the Forget-Me-Nots!" And yet, my heart clung to even the slightest hope. Marie Durand! I knew her secret power! One thankful glance of the splendid eyes repaid Trepoff for his manly courtesy to a fallen idol. He turned away in a storm of silent sorrow; and the woman he loved spared him one last pang. "Give me your arm," said she to me. I conducted her to the front entrance, where Colonel Luboff, turban in hand, gave her his hand. It was Haxo's order to make no public exhibition of the family's secret disgrace. She pressed my arm with her trembling fingers. I knew her message! On the threshold of the house, into which her fatal presence had brought such general misery and heart-break, she paused and turned her head, in a last passionate farewell to me. It was a message for Dimitri Trepoff; and I loyally received it. Her eyes met mine. A light not from the unreal world we know shone on that pale, proud face! I closed my eyes as I prayed to God for His mercy, His helping hand, stretched out over us both.

She was gone! Perhaps forever, out of my troubled existence; and I had forgotten that I was a prisoner on parole. Down the stair, with graceful step, I saw her from the salon window pass with the Colonel; and she stepped to the sleigh as if going to a ball at the Winter



Palace. There was no stir on the snow-mantled street, only the usual huddle of humanity "going to and fro vainly," as their fathers have done for ages and their children will to the end of time. How brave and stately she looked, standing there with her eyes fixed on Trepoff, at the window.

The Colonel seated Hermione with every care; her bright, lovely face was turned to the window, seeking still her lover's face. He stood there, his duty veiling the higher duty of love, for her life—her dear life's sake!

One last glance of tender, imploring passionate "Farewell," the driver loosed the impatient steeds, and onward they darted, out into the driving storm. Hermione threw her laces closely around her face. The departing couple drove away as if on pleasure bent; and now, to secret work! I had lost the "sister" given me by the hand of Destiny! But I swore in my heart never to abandon her while her heart quivered in its sorrow. The poor ill-starred "Queen of the Forget-Me-Nots!" Up stairs lay my dear Madeleine; in a grief not to be assuaged was hidden from me one sister dividing another's first great sorrow, and the whole house lay under the shadow of the darkness of my troubles! Poor Serge was doomed to a helpless silence, and Trepoff's hands were tied.

I threw myself into a chair, in absolute exhaustion. It was a grim outlook. Trepoff touched my arm. "I must make this search!" he said in English. "Beware! We are watched every moment! God help us all! Come with me to your room! What devil's work is this whole sudden attack! You can help me to save Hermione! I will leave you in your room with the Captain. I will see all our friends in his house, then,—I will then examine your baggage! And then, my God, to help Hermione!" I entered my room, passing through Hermione's deserted apartment, where all her scattered belongings spoke of womanly refinement and taste. "Will we ever see her face again?" he groaned. "Oh! God! I am going mad! I will shoot myself if she is torn from me!"

The Captain was in my room, and an agent in each apartment. I dared not continue a conversation with Dimitri, who was losing his self-control. I seated myself

as they tumbled my effects over. Trepoff remarked, "Captain, I place you in charge here. I will return soon. You may ring for anything you want," said he to me. And his eyes told me he had gone to confer with Serge Zastrow. The Captain saluted and sat down. My resolution was taken. I would guard an absolute silence; only briefly replying to any queries; and perhaps Hermione might evade the meshes of the law! I lit a cigar and tried to collect my thoughts. It was better that Trepoff should be my only confidant; Vera and Serge would be a unit. I could reach the Komaroffs and Mouravieffs through them. And, as for my sisters, I must suffer, and let Time bring my justification. Justine and Madeleine would be spared the insult of being witnesses! Evidently they would be well treated. I could not explain till Hermione's fate was decided. And what would be mine! Would I be imprisoned?

General Haxo had it in his cruel hands. What was his real game? Not altogether my absolute master,—there was some law! Probably he would not go too far in my own case. American political friendship is supposed to be necessary to Russia, as our Pacific coast line is their only friendly neutral shore in case of war with England. They would not ruin me, even for a social intrigue. But, poor Hermione! There were powers as high as even the great Haxo, in icy Muscovy! But I must not fight him! I glanced at the rather stupid-looking young Captain. He was a human blank,—a mere official thing tied to a sword! I would be courteous in manner to him, and that would suffice; for he was in temporary charge of an American sovereign, and I must be sure to disguise Trepoff's friendship by courting him alone.

It was growing dark. The great electric lights flashed out on the gray battlements of the fortress beyond the chilly river. And there, behind these guarded gates, Hermione's sighs and tears were now mingled with the general wail of the crowded prison. The falcon was caged. God pity her! And what was the real cause of her seizure! Yet, a mystery.

What would be her situation! I felt sure she would,

until conviction, be treated with some decency, out of regard to the high families socially connected with her brief career as my "sister." The Russian tiger can afford to dally with his prey; for one fell spring ends the grisly pantomime. It is a land of fearful surprises! They would try to extract information from her. To force her secret from her,—the untold secret of her past history,—and to unlock her carven lips! But how,—what hideous means would break her proud spirit? I dared not think. I shuddered and left the window—a prisoner, too! My two angered sisters! The one insulted, the other heart-broken at my disgrace! I must let nature assert itself, and my full justification must wait. Trepoff could help me there at last, but I dared not involve him and the dashing Serge. As to General Zastrow and his family, I must try and keep them out of the future entanglement of the trial. They would be brief and not too embittered witnessess, I hoped, against me. No present explanation to them was possible. Myself! Ah! yes! I was in the very gravest trouble for a lawyer! My offense would be, perhaps, bounded by a short term of imprisonment; probably it would be short or long, as Hermione was found innocent or guilty. But of what specific offense! As an American counselor, I had unwittingly disgraced my calling!

Stunned and wearied, I rang for a glass of wine and waited, throwing myself on a couch. I dared not plead that I had been forced into a false position by the reckless Captain! What would our Minister do!

The jingle of sleigh-bells aroused me. I saw Madame Komaroff descend from her cutter, assisted by the footman in attendance. Here was another serious arraignment of me, for social deception. But, I felt Vera would explain all to her, to save Serge Zastrow. In a half-hour, Dimitri returned. The Captain walked into the front room. He was modest before the dashing field officer of the swell Paul Regiment. As Confidential Aid of the Grand Duke Michael (a dauntless and decorated field officer), Trepoff could be trusted anywhere. He was "in charge," by the Haxo's orders; and well that schemer knew that Trepoff would honorably perform his official

trusts. Dimitri rolled a cigarette, and began his recital. "Madeleine, the real Madeleine, is very ill," said he. "Madame Zastrow and Justine are with her. The poor girl must be spared any talking, for the physician fears brain fever. Your sister Justine will not hear a word," he sighed, and continued, "for Commodore Zastrow will be simply frantic over such an open scandal. It is pretty hard," he sighed. "Vera and Serge know all now. They will help you for the family interest. You are not in the gravest danger; but Hermione,—my God! I cannot bear to think! I will probably be relieved from this case, if General Haxo can prejudice me with the Grand Duke. I suppose he only uses me as a poor deference to old Michael Zastrow's record and unsullied name! The dear old General himself can do nothing. They must all be kept in the background. He asked me to say that your sick sister shall have every needed help and comfort. You had better not see him now! He is very bitter against you, naturally; and if he thought Serge and I had aided you, he would go mad with rage! Serge will be up and can help us in a day or so, for his trouble about the duel will be dropped. Now, I will go and consult him; for Hermione's life depends on our rallying all the secret influence we can command! The charges are as yet in the dark. Zastrow has asked me to take charge of all your effects, and Hermione's," he said, with some awkwardness; "for they will send you over there to be examined," he said, very gently putting the case. "You may trust me," said he, with feeling. "I know that, Trepoff," said I, brokenly. "I cannot justify myself to the old General now, but I will some day. I would never have consented to this risky deception. Serge forced it on me." "I am aware of that," warmly said Trepoff. "Still, it is an awful blow to us just now. Let me do what I can till we can safely talk!"—and he glanced at the open door. "I told Serge myself the whole thing would go to pieces at a touch—just as it has done. Madame Komaroff wants to see you for a moment. I shall permit her, as she is far beyond possible suspicion. Try and interest her," said the Major, as he walked out. "I am astonished at your two sisters being lured on here. There

is some dark side yet to the whole affair," he muttered. The silent Captain took his place. Alas! I knew too well my letters had given Haxo all the family details he needed—the stolen ones! In a few moments, the Countess Komaroff entered. I rose and kissed her hand respectfully. The stately lady seated herself and smiled like a good fairy. Vera had evidently won her sympathy. "I am sorry for you, Mr. Grahame," she said, "and I have promised Vera to help the poor foolish one over there now!" Her cheerfulness brightened me up a little.

"Tell me all that you properly can," said she, as the Major and his junior left the room. I was in a quandary. I dared not implicate Serge or tell the story of Trepoff's mad love. I decided to allege treachery in stealing my letters and a plot against my clients. I briefly referred to the events, and ignored their real causes. I dwelt on the devilish forgery and treachery which had lured both my poor sisters to such a crushing shock of studied cruelty. "These things will make a stir at the Legation! My sisters have been trapped by official duplicity; and it will discredit your authorities! Poor women,—they are utterly innocent!" I said. "You are right!" the Countess said, thoughtfully. "It was an outrage to drag them into this! I know that my heart goes out to them," replied this good angel. She was accustomed to these tableaux in real life. "You see that I never wrote or telegraphed them to come!" I said. "It was that fiend Haxo; and he went far beyond his duty," said the spirited Countess. "I will help you with Count Mouravieff and my husband. I know Haxo's reputation! He wished to get that strange beauty into his power, and has tried to ruin you to reach her! Who can she be!"

I told her of all the duel, in its full relation to us. "That one of Haxo's underlings had deliberately insulted the harmless woman!" The Princess mused a few moments. "There is a great deal behind this!" she decided. "We do not know her charges yet." She looked very grave. "The General has involved himself in taking such a man from the Emperor's side and setting him on to fight Serge! I shall have Count Mouravieff send

for Major Trepoff! You know Nicolas is head of the Privy Council! And, this poor Hermione," said she, rising and taking my two hands. Her sparkling eyes were fixed on mine earnestly. "Can I—ought I to—aid her? Can I let my daughter follow her own generous wishes and sue to the Emperor! I ask this on the honor of manhood! Is she worthy? Do you know anything? Is it only some headlong romantic folly, or is she an adventuress who sought a safe field here?" "You can do all a noble woman may for that unfortunate," I replied, firmly. "There is no shame between us,—there never was. This situation was forced on us both! I can explain to you some day, and you shall know all. She is to be pitied—this Hermione whose life I know something of. Your lovely daughter can help in this work!" "I believe you! I will help you!" said she, rising. "There has been wrong done to your own innocent sisters! Let this be used to palliate this Hermione's foolish deceit! Let Trepoff know all! I will see that he gets a pass to visit your companion!" My heart leaped up! Here was the first gleam of light! "Do you know who she really is?" the Countess queried. "Madame, on my honor, I do not. I only surmise!" said I, as I gratefully kissed the gracious lady's hand. "She has promised her full confidence to me, when out of Russia. There are others to shield besides me!" I said boldly; and the lady understood. "She has great refinement, and her talents and beauty are wonderful!" replied Madame Komaroff, musingly. "Even her nationality is not betrayed by any marked mannerism. She is undoubtedly a European, and well born!" persisted the curious Countess, eying me with interest. I was being gently cross-examined. "She is certainly a continental lady of high birth," I replied, cautiously. "You will know all yet from her lips, Madame, I hope, when she is free!" I begged her in parting to tell my dear and beloved Madeleine that I was guiltless of the seeming deceit. I implored her to urge on the angry Justine also my claims to a patient hearing. I ventured to say that "a man of honor can hold but one course—to guard a woman's secrets!" "Trust me, Colonel; but I advise you in future to beware of all handsome strange

goddesses!" was the parting sally of the mercurial Russian lady whose eagerness to know all mingled a spice of womanish vindictiveness against my unfortunate sex, with the warm sympathies of her kind heart. "It is strange how many risks are taken for young and beautiful wanderers! Now, if she had been old and ugly"—she waved her fan, and said, "Au revoir!" as she swept down the stair. She had whispered, "You are in no serious danger; but, God help your friend Hermione, as Vera calls her, before a summary court!"

Major Trepoff entered in a few moments. "I will now formally examine your luggage, and make a list of your effects," said he. "I know you are all right; so I'll not try to hoodwink my junior." He called the Captain and a police agent. I rang for my own man, on a hint from Trepoff's eyes. I then silently smoked and watched the thorough inspection of my belongings. All was right. "They can tumble them over at will. I do not fear," was my inward comment. "Perfectly satisfactory," said the Captain, with evident relief, as the police agent noted the whole details, signing the paper first himself and presenting it to his superior, who affixed his own official signature. "Now, we will examine the other room," said Dimitri. "I have two women waiting there from the dressmaker's, and one of them is the seamstress whom Hermione employed." He sighed as he spoke; but I could see a gleam of triumph in his eye. Marie Durand was near to help us now! "I will have her overlook all the boxes and then pack up what is needed, and as she is not very strong the other woman will go over in the morning with the goods to the fortress. I wish you to be present, as General Haxo intimated you would be held responsible for the prisoner! General Michael has named M'lle Dauvray to represent him, under the laws of 'domiciliary search,' as he and his wife will be formal witnesses on their own account, as they are responsible for 'the house' in all its legal relations." I understood him. We then entered Hermione's deserted apartment. The bright bird, alas, had flown forever, but it spoke of her graceful presence, in all its scattered elegance. I seated myself in watchful silence in the chair, at the writ-

ing table. Trepoff rang the bell, with a grave official manner. "Send up those two women at once!" said he, as the man appeared. "Then give my compliments to M'lle Dauvray, and ask her to be good enough to join me here, by request of General Zastrow!" The servant bowed and withdrew. So! the governess was a witness! In a moment he ushered in two plainly dressed women. I instantly recognized the faithful "Durand," with her face swathed in a muffler—a case of neuralgia; a very severe case evidently. She gave me one quick glance. I saw that she knew all. The servants' hall is a general gossip exchange in Russia; and she was now thoroughly posted. "*Partout comme chez nous!*" Servants rule the masters who pamper and pay them! The kingdom of the vile! I was on guard, for was not Hermione's fate now at stake? The other woman was evidently chosen by her, and was one of the Dark Order, whose loyalty and coolness could be depended on. And so, Hermione was not friendless, though a prisoner as yet on unknown charges.

The rustling of a gown announced the approach of the pale, self-contained Dauvray! She spoke in a low tone to Major Trepoff, who turned to me and said (as if only a host, instead of my keeper), "Walter, your dinner will be sent to your room as soon as this is over! The General requests you to give all your usual household directions through the Captain; and then you will receive instant attention." I bowed silently. Russian hospitality still, even if under a cloud! The gray-eyed French woman gazed with gentle interest at me—a pitying interest. The room was brilliantly lighted up, as it was now dark outside. I met her eyes gravely and appeared not to notice her presence beyond returning her respectful bow. I had already enemies enough! And we were not social foes—my past was friendly as far as she was concerned. Whom was she hunting down? It was her brief hour of triumph, though, and she showed it. She cast her eyes carelessly on the two women who sat silently by as the agent unstrapped all the boxes, which had been prepared for our departure. She did not recognize Marie Durand, and now, I understood the origin of Russian neuralgic attacks. The Captain had noted the number



and marks of all the packages. We were all ready to begin a search which I felt was only a mere formality. "Proceed!" said Major Trepoff. "Let us see every object!" The women emptied the trunks, one by one, placing all the contents of each in a pile, after the most searching examination. Not a single word was spoken, save the directions to repack each as it was finished and sealed by the attendant policeman. Not a scrap of paper, not a suspicious article, so far! I breathed freely. One after another of the cases was examined, and Le Brun quietly directed the rearrangement of all the wardrobe. Two or three cases were left open to receive the useful and needed articles to be dispatched to that dressy resort—the fortress. It was nearly done! The other cases were now closed, locked and sealed. The keys being handed one by one to Major Trepoff, who made notes in his own private book, as well as an official list. He would have no foul play. All was progressing well; only one or two pieces remained. A portmanteau case with the jewels and some scattered small affairs closed the long list. I watched Félise Dauvray's eyes sleeping under their long lashes. She was grave-faced; and yet her lips wore a peculiar smile—a happy one!

From time to time, Durand's eyes met mine. She indicated her fear of the ugly looking French woman by one stony, furtive look. I could see she would like to communicate to me. But I dared not, for the revengeful governess brooded there cat-like, and gazed intently as each finger was lifted, and I began to fear the end was not yet come. As my man entered on some trifling errand, Durand's eyes indicated him to me as her friend. I could see then that he was "all right." He was also a silent rebel, a plotter, and a brother of the mysterious order. We had some champions, at any rate, among all these banded foes. But Haxo held the whip hand so far. Durand made a signal that he had a letter for me. The quick-witted fellow made a motion to indicate a service-tray. Ah! yes! I could see! At dinner he would bring me news; and from whom? Durand sat motionless—keen alert! Faithful woman! Risking her life for us! I could read the relief on Trepoff's fine face as our task

was nearly finished. Nothing yet—not a scrap! All the loose articles were examined. Only the jewel port-manteau remained now. “I am personally responsible for these valuables!” said Dimitri, as he stepped to it, standing at the Dauvray’s side. The key of this had been given to Major Trepoff on General Haxo’s demand for Hermione’s keys; and her lover now held the last secret in his trembling hand. “I shall inventory all these valuable articles,” said the Major to me, “and give you a list of them. You can then send it and sign the duplicates. I will deposit them in the St. Petersburg bank till further orders.” The young Captain bowed in obedience. Trepoff seemed calm. He knew that Hermione’s jewels were worthy of her rank in the social life she had ornamented, and he opened the case carelessly. But it was also the most suspected place of resort for womanhood’s love secrets. I caught the governess’ eye, with sparkling interest, watching the Major, who called off the different articles to the Captain. “Mademoiselle, will you assist me to describe these ornaments?” said Trepoff, as he began on the enumeration. “I wish to be very careful with them, as they seem to be very valuable.” She glided to his side like a snake, and, in passing, gave me a glance of unutterable hatred. The mask was off, now! What did she mean? I read “Victory!” in her deadly sneer. And, I trembled as I held my breath. There was a last shot yet to be fired. The Captain had been summoned as another government witness, and was also making a careful list of the jewels. Durand and her companion were now idle, and the under-agents retired, respectfully, to the next room. The heavy work was all finished. The backs of the others were now turned. I could see that Durand watched me most anxiously. She dropped a letter from her sleeve, and then shoved it in between the cushions of the couch she sat on. Ah! our postoffice—our own invention! In a moment, she rose and went to the front window with her companion, carelessly seating herself on a chair. She wished me to go to the new postoffice; so I quietly changed my place with no apparent purpose. The letter was soon safely in my hand. I bent down, as if arranging my shoe, and then

slipped it in my stocking. If searched, I might escape. I trembled as I did so. Had I been seen? I breathed freer; for I was apparently unobserved. No danger! The French fiend was seemingly feasting her eyes on the jewel casket. So much was done toward establishing a thorough mutual plan of action. What next? Ah! if Trepoff could only be away, now, rallying the friends of the poor prisoner! For my strange extra "sister" was now in a cell. Trepoff raised the tray of the casket and examined the whole interior. A sudden exclamation escaped his lips! What had happened? He turned to the chandelier! His face was in agony, as the Captain and Félise Dauvray sprang to his side. He sighed, as he motioned them to a seat at the table. The sigh of a lost soul! In his hands was a packet of papers—papers! I dropped my head. I knew now the cause of the triumph shining in that she-wolf's eyes. Trepoff was pale as death—and he could not falter a moment now. Yes! the papers in his hands might be Hermione's ruin; and to withhold them would mean the loss of his own head!

Durand had turned quietly, as nothing ever surprised her in Russia. She knew it too well now. It was the same old scheme, which always wins. Papers introduced into an innocent person's baggage; and no one could deny that damning fact! She was lost now! Trepoff and the officer seated themselves and unfolded the documents, counting them with care. The young Captain seemed a military ghost. The expression of Dimitri's face, too, appalled me. He looked like a man signing the death warrant of a queen, as he affixed his initials to the papers, numbering them and dating them. Great God! Félise Dauvray knew all, and would make Trepoff Hermione's betrayer,—and then Haxo's triumph! It was the work of Hell itself! Yes! in the cell, alone with Haxo, she would plead for mercy—on what terms? The young Captain did the same, and even his stolid face grew solemn as he used the pen unwillingly. The work of a pre-condemnation of an innocent woman! Yes! this was a sweet revenge! But, the Captain blushed. He was not a hardened butcher yet! He was still young. Standing at the table was Mademoiselle Dauvray, gloating over

the scene. I could have throttled her; but I caught Major Trepoff's warning eye. It told me of hope,—even against hope, —now! “You read Russian, Made-moiselle?” coldly said Dimitri. His voice had a far-off sound. He was undergoing the ordeal of those pitiless French eyes, the scorned woman, whom his friend had wronged.

“No, sir; I understand enough to speak, but I do not read and write it yet.” Her voice was measured, but her eyes could not disguise the triumph of a mean soul with an enemy at its mercy. She did not read Russian. Then, how did she know the fatal contents?—for, her face told its own story of the one blissful victory of a whole life. Behind her there, stood Durand, who had risen noiselessly, and, with her eyes solemnly fixed on me, she traced a death-cross in the air, standing hidden behind the governess, thus silently devoting her to the infernal gods. Ah! Great God! I joyed in that ominous threatening finger! The Mosaic law! The woman was now under the sword of Damocles! It was clear to me in an instant. The governess had gained the time in her capacity of housekeeper to probably introduce some artisan spy disguised as a house servant! The key had been made, or else Helene's duplicated! Perhaps her keys had been stolen as she slept. Was this last possible! No, she would detect it. Our night at the opera flashed over me. There was time then. The rooms were untenanted for hours. Yes! that unlucky night! It was in that long evening the work had been done, and the papers could easily have been introduced while we were away. But the story was hidden now! Hermione had not seen the documents that night when she replaced her jewels! They were found under the bottom of the tray. It was a piece of dastardly, damnable work! The whole plot was now clear to me. The governess had warned General Haxo of our impending departure, which he could not officially prevent! Thanks to Mouravieff's influence, we had our papers in order. No evidence beyond that of a mere foolish adventure was treasured against Hermione up to that time—a private love affair would have explained all away. Her marriage with Trepoff sealed its

truth. But the spy Radzivill was to insult Hermione, and quarrel with Serge! We would be arrested and detained. The search would be then made and all the papers found! They had closed up all the links of the chain! Horrible! Possibly Radzivill was also to swear against the beauty on the trial, and then the papers would finish the ruin of my poor companion—my extra sister! Once in the fortress, her trial rushed through, Haxo could detain her in some lonely prison—at his mercy. But, Serge's deadly aim broke up the first programme. Still, the sly French woman had notified the General that the incriminating papers were all safely introduced into the casket! So, the Chief himself took personal charge of the affair. It was his only chance now to get a criminal hold on Hermione, to search her rooms.

Dimitri's face told me the whole story. Were the papers veritable? I could not tell. But, of what use to argue, when I could see the papers would hang a prisoner! And, Trepoff's Grand Duke was a stern foe of all conspiracy.

Durand moved around noiselessly, arranging little things. She had some secret scheme, I could see; every moment was precious now. The papers were sealed in a packet and Dimitri, as well as the Captain, wrote their initials over the seals in silence. There seemed to be a new taint in the air—the poisoned air of the Neva!

The remaining jewels were listed, and the two lists compared and signed. I could not read Dimitri Trepoff's gravely solemn face; but neither could Félise Dauvray. It was a marvel of self-repression. All was over. Trepoff pocketed the key. There was now no excuse for delay. The Major looked very significantly at me as he said, dryly, gazing directly into her gray eyes, "Madoiselle, you direct the whole household, do you not?" "I do, principally," was her quiet reply, but she winced under his gaze. "Who has had access to these rooms except Monsieur Grahame and the lady herself?" he questioned. "No one but the servant and the maid who always waited on madame," she replied. "Are they in the house now?" was the next question. Félise was very uneasy now. "Yes, sir," calmly rejoined the governess, as

she rose, in an apparent respect for his orders. "Please favor me with calling them here at once, and identifying them in my presence!" continued the Major, pleasantly. "I want their names. This is a very serious matter!" The governess dropped her gray eyes modestly.

This was done. The man I knew was safe. The woman was also an old house servant and devoted to the Zastrows. Their names were duly taken.

"Are these all who would have a right here?" said Trepoff. "All, except myself," said the cold French woman, looking the Major steadily in the eye. She had the nerve of a duellist of the old régime. "Ah! I see," said the inquisitor, carelessly, "you always had access!" There was a slight emphasis which brought a red spot flaming to her cheeks. "Mademoiselle, you can now leave us. Your identification of the papers in this package and the circumstance of our finding them is all that I ask you to remember!" She bowed in silence. "Will you please give orders to have these two women properly treated. They will both stay here to-night. I wish to remove all these articles to-morrow." "Certainly, Monsieur,"—she bowed, and then withdrew with a cold air and a scornful glance in my direction. She seemed a misplaced queen—one very sure of her coming into her kingdom. How would Haxo reward her? Gold, or what high return? "You may go down below. I will send for you to-morrow morning," said Dimitri, after questioning the second woman as to her own passport papers and residence, as well as her past references. The poor frightened servant told her modest history. She truthfully gave these, and they both withdrew. It is only honesty which trembles in these fin de siècle days. Major Trepoff rang the bell. My man appeared. Ah! a friend near me at last—an active friend—one to trust. So Durand's eyes told me again. "Have a dinner served in this room for the Captain," said he. "Serve Monsieur Grahame in the other room at once! Don't forget to obey all his orders—even the slightest!" The man bowed to the floor. "Immediately, sir," was his reply, as he scuttled away. Trepoff sighed and then walked into the other room. He fingered his sword hilt. His hands

were not used to such dirty business. Still, his change of position—for the Captain was forced, on his honor, to watch us while there with him—was a godsend to me. I followed him, and sat down at his side. I was utterly crushed! I had the unread letter hidden in my stocking, and thence I expected to gain important news. How could even friendly nobles of the highest rank avail against such treachery! Hermione's fate hung upon those papers. She was doomed, even before trial! "It looks black," said Trepoff, quietly. "That French woman put these papers in the box. I must turn them in to Haxo. They are very dangerous proof! Of course, the Captain has the list. We have jointly marked all." "Can't you do anything?" I anxiously queried. "Destroy the proofs, or foil the scheme!" "Not now!—nothing yet! I must think—must see Serge, too. I will go to dinner, and wait for General Haxo. It will be a week or so before the trial. The moment Haxo lets me go, I will work night and day! But, this will cause you to be temporarily imprisoned! I will see you later. I stay here. Keep up courage! Say nothing! You are only involved!—nothing else! The Legation will have to stand by you! But, Hermione's life hangs on a hair now!"

He went away heavy-hearted, for the bundle of papers was a crushing weight on his breast, and he was officially compelled to tie a halter around the neck of the woman he loved. I could not understand his self-control. My dinner was soon on the table. I was tired and weary, and I could not eat. Russia had made my appetite a very capricious delusion. I only wanted travel. I took a little soup, a bit of fowl, and drank off a goblet of wine—for I must keep up appearances, too. Then I addressed myself to a cup of coffee and a cigar. What was Trepoff's plan! He had one; but must first get rid of his formal duty here. The man returned with the Captain's dinner. Soon he was busied satisfying his heavy animal nature. I had finally read the secret of the whole affair. Haxo had only used the government to betray Hermione into his own hands! He cared for nothing else.

My man returned. He looked at the table. "Don't

neglect the bread, sir," said the man, significantly, in a whisper, as he placed his finger on his lip. There was a new thankfulness in my heart for "daily bread." I seized the loaf, with a look of mute thanks. The clatter of dishes told me that the Captain was now happy. The man was liberally pouring his wine. I tore the long loaf open. A slip of paper was folded therein. I read my good Durand's last note. Brave, quick-witted comrade! I began to envy that shadowy lover—who had seen her at her best. The note read:

"The governess put the papers in the box. Trust to the woman I leave. She speaks French. I will be lingering at hand outside the prison. They might, perhaps, know me there. Work strongly on Major Trepoff. I will communicate with you later. Let me know by the man what General Haxo directs to-night. Give him a note. He will bring you coffee late. We are all working for our friend. We can get notes safely to her as soon as we know where she is placed in the fortress. Money will do its work, even there. We have friends, too. I will be there to-morrow. General Haxo only wants her in his power. I will direct you what to do. Destroy this. You need not fear for a final result. Haxo will not follow you up. But—the governess. †"

The note ended with an ominous cross.

I quickly relit my cigar with the twisted paper, and saw the last scrap consumed. I drew out from my shoe the other, for I was safe now. It was also short.

"Trepoff and your friends must find some way for you to let Hermione know we of the order are working for her. Her letter with its signs is understood. Every one is true. We have some friends in the fortress garrison. We will avenge her fearfully, if any wrong is done to her. We will watch over you. Be silent. Interest all your family friends, the whole connection, for clemency. Reach the Emperor and Empress if you can. Trust the man; I will open communication with both of you. The French woman dies, if she testifies against Hermione. She is under a sentence now. We want to get her in our



hands, and torture the truth out of her! Leave her to us. Work night and day for Hermione's pardon—for she will, of course, be convicted. They always convict."

I reduced this also to ashes, and lay down to rest. The hours dragged on slowly to nine o'clock, and the Captain's jolly friendship with the bottle kept me awake. At half-past nine, the door opened. I was resting and listening to the merrymakers flying by outside. I felt a little relieved as Durand's active energy recurred to me, and, also, by the hovering watchful aid of the "order."

My personal safety was now also hazarded by these infamous documents. I would demand my rights as an American. I thought of my lawyer and of the Legation. But, oh! for the banks of the Schuylkill. Yet, I had a score to settle there now. The Captain sat drowsily in the open doorway of the next room and stolidly watched me. My situation was indeed miserable. I appreciated all the troubles of the hour! Madeleine! Justine!—the one sick and crushed, the other dead to my dangerous position, and deaf to my entreaties! The man brought coffee. I gave him a note. "Thanks! All right!"—these three words were all I dared to write. A knock at the door! General Haxo entered with an aide—a stranger. Major Trepoff followed. And here I was abandoned by my two sisters, and a disgrace to my host. Yes, Serge's dashing plan had failed. I rose silently. My legal craft stood me in good stead here. The cold voice of the Chief pronounced my immediate punishment. "You will be removed, sir, under charge of Major Trepoff, to the fortress to-morrow. You can give him an open note with any directions you may wish to leave as to your effects. It will be the end of his official connection with this affair. I only allowed him to act here to spare General Zastrow all possible annoyance. For the present, he can communicate with you at the prison, and bring you news of your sisters and your affairs. I leave you in his charge for to-night." He turned to go away. I advanced a step firmly and faced him. "May I ask what I am accused of?" said I, carefully restraining any feeling. I had lost all that buoyant spread eaglesism which I brought to the Neva. "You will know at the fortress

to-morrow! Your case will be taken up at once," was the reply; "and you will have your Minister to appeal to, besides." "Can I have my lawyer see me and communicate at once with the American Legation?" I firmly continued. The General seemed a little touched by my attitude. "You can make a formal request to that effect to the Governor of the prison. He will send for you and question you. I presume you will have no trouble as to that." I bowed in silence, and the General raised his eyes from a study of Hermione's vacated apartments. The three officers went away, for I ceased as I saw further talk was useless. In a few moments Dimitri Trepoff returned. His face was very grave. "Madeleine is seriously ill," he said. "I am sorry to say that she has every symptom of brain fever. Justine Zastrow refuses to speak as regards your case. I presume it is only fear—in her case. She trusts to your own legal ability, I presume. But, General Zastrow goes to the Winter Palace to-morrow. He will ask an audience at once of the Emperor! His wife will make your people comfortable! The papers found in Hermione's box are, however, of a fearful significance! General Haxo will make the most of them in court! You will undoubtedly be tried first: and all that may be developed in your case,—will then be used against that poor woman! Vera—her parents and the Mouravieffs,—are now our only hope to save you from a disgraceful imprisonment! If you will keep as silent as you can, and are simply submissive, you will probably be nominally sentenced to a short confinement, but only sent over the frontier under guard! They will remit that, I think, after trying you—only to condemn her! This is Haxo's plan. Your sisters will receive every courtesy by the especial order of the Minister of the Interior. Haxo took pains to tell me that he did not know how they came here! Some enemies of your clients, he suggests. General Zastrow and his wife may be questioned, but they will not suffer. Serge will not be called to account at all for that scoundrel's death. The Minister had that whole matter before the privy council. It is dropped! So, Grahame,—your generous attitude at Serge's instance, has tied you down; for, my poor friend,

! you can not tell the truth—and—ruin us all! It was a fatal mistake!" The kindly man hesitated and stopped. I knew his forebodings.

"And, Hermione! Trepoff!—tell me her fate," I murmured. "For myself, I care not, now!" He spoke like a man in a dream.

"If I did not live to either free her—or avenge her," he slowly said, "I would kill myself to-night,—after shooting Haxo!"

"Death!—is her doom!" was the last word, as he wrung my hand and went out with eyes clouded with bitter tears. "Unless Vera can reach the Empress!—and, my God!—it is a forlorn hope!"—he sobbed.

One sister perhaps dying,—the other already foredoomed to be followed up for my foolish conduct! I was a nice, considerate brother! I slept in abject misery.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### MY TRIAL! DIMITRI'S QUEST! SEEKING A LOCKSMITH.

I awoke from the troubled dreams of night. The deep sleep of absolute exhaustion brought me no relief. My man was already stirring in the room. Thick curtains shut out a heavy snowstorm, and the lights were all burning. It was my black day! The attendant had touched me lightly and pressed a billet in my hands, as I awoke. I glanced at its few words. They recalled my troubles—past—and to come!

"Send me any news up to your leaving by the man. I shall see him to-night. Durand." So, I had, at least, one friend—when my sisters abandoned me. I instantly destroyed it and nodded. The waiter left. It was eight o'clock now. My Muscovite police guardian was already stirring outside the door. His breakfast soon made its appearance. He then resumed his duty of looking after his own comfort; satisfying himself of my presence by looking in occasionally. Soon my man served my last morning meal at the Zastrows. With great

thoughtfulness, it was a liberal one, the usual courtesy to the condemned. Not a cheerful omen! The "Roman-off Restaurant" in the fortress was not equal to the Zastrow cuisine, by general report. I was now to try it. I was leisurely sipping my coffee and thinking over my immediate cares and dangers, when Major Trepoff entered. He greeted me heartily, and proceeded at once to business. His face was that of a man who had not slept!

"Make out a skeleton list of your effects," said he. "Take an ordinary portmanteau of traveling wear. I will now dispatch the woman, and the goods, after the doctor comes. I have to send the Captain over with her. Then, I will see all in this house,—and give you a last morning report. Take all the papers in your trunk. They will be called for. I have been out at work all night!" he whispered,—with haggard eyes.

"You can make a note of what you want me to do!" He nodded and disappeared.

"Every moment is golden!" he said. "I must save her!"

I busied myself with the man and arranged to accept "the Czar's invitation," as forcibly extended by General Haxo, "to spend a few days at one of his many family castles!"—a most unexpected favor—quite undeserved, too! I hoped the visit would not be a very long one! It might be! All was ready. I waited with impatience for news from the dear, broken-hearted Madeleine,—on her bed of pain. But, how could I justify myself now without exposing Serge and Dimitri?—the secret of Hermione must be kept. Did she know all my danger? No! Thank God! Hours passed on. It was nearly noon. Trepoff was still absent. I divined his secret labors for both of us. The jingle of sleighs coming and going was incessant. The house was like a guard station. I rang for the man and asked him the reason.

"Very many friends of the General are calling and sending cards," was his reply. "The story is all over Petersburg now,—so, Major Trepoff's man tells me!" Ah! Ruin! So, the old nobility were rallying around poor Michael Zastrow. The tidings had been, of course,

well spread by the adroit "Dauvray" woman!—coachman, hair dresser and upper servants are the Figaros of the gay City of Peter! The Dvornik, too, gets all the news, away, via the servants' hall and lady's maid,—with the watchful valet! Any interesting intelligence flies like the wind! And, now—Hermione's whole secret would filter out! She was lost—beyond all hope! I shuddered for Trepoff's mind! I was glad of this general expression of confidence in General Zastrow's household! This was the only mute protest allowable to his many friends. Cold, bleak, wintry darkness hung like a pall without,—only the snow-mantled parapet of the river banks was visible, with the dark waters beyond flaked with tumbling cakes of ice! And, Hermione was locked beyond that tide! Alone—helpless! What a day! Trouble and suffering within! Gloom without and poor Hermione powerless in the grasp of the Russian Bear!

My thoughts wandered away to the pleasant blue mountains of Pennsylvania, where the nodding pines sing their song of wind-waked music, in the free air of America. Ah! Yes! I saw clearly—a Philadelphian should not wander! Why leave dear old Slumbertown? The star-flowered flag was kissing every breeze proudly there! Would I ever greet its gleaming glories again? It was at least doubtful,—so my logical mind summed up this most interesting case,—my own. Dimitri Trepoff returned, briskly.

"I will now dispatch the Captain and the woman, with the baggage for Hermione. I have seen all. Your sister is still very sick." He gave his last directions to the Captain, who then rang and caused the boxes for Hermione to be taken down to the interior court. There a sleigh, with an agent, and a baggage conveyance, waited for them. The two women were directed to report to Major Trepoff. They came up to Hermione's room and were now ready for any service. I detained the breakfast service and prepared writing material, to as to be able to give my man a note for Durand. My last "outside" letter! The busy Trepoff proceeded to inform me of affairs.

"All is generally quiet. Serge able to move around.

Vera and her mother with your ladies. Madeleine too sick to be told of your present danger. She is out of her head! Write a note and leave with me for her. Don't excite her by any explanation. The General will go to the palace to-day, on an audience. He has been notified to appear at the fortress at ten to-morrow, as a witness on your trial. All the others are excused except him. Thank Heaven! the ladies will not be dragged into it. Your sister Justine will see you in the parlor before you go! The other ladies have all been talking to her! Of course, she will forgive you—she must! Zastrow will tell me the result of his audience. I will see you early to-morrow before your trial and report. For, I am then free, and will get a few days' leave from the Grand Duke. You know what for! So, I will now dispatch these people."

While Trepoff went in and informed the sewing woman of her duty, and told her he would protect her and see her well paid, I wrote my brief scrawl to Durand. I was careful in so doing, for I had lost all faith in manhood—and—womanhood, too—especially the latter. So I wrote:

"I am to go over soon to the fort. I will be tried to-morrow. Probably will be expelled from the country or imprisoned. Major Trepoff will know all. H. will be tried at once after me, I suppose. Watch the Frenchwoman. Do all you can for Madame Hermione. Rally every friend,—we are all at work here. W G."

I rang the bell and then slipped the note under the tray. The man nodded significantly, and went out into the hall. He returned and removed the service used by the Captain. Durand very kindly assisted him with the tray. I knew the note had changed hands! I walked to the door and caught her eye. She had received it. The Captain now reported all ready. The woman departed, leaving Durand in the room. The party soon left quietly for the fortress with the baggage. And, I was the next victim!

"You may remain till the housekeeper comes," said

the Major to the watchful Durand. "Stay down below!" She nodded and smiled. Trepoff said: "I wish to confer with Serge,"—and he went out, leaving a mute agent seated in the room with the faithful dressmaker, who lingered—trying to reach me—alone!

I sat down and wrote my own dear suffering Madeleine a letter, which recalled our very happiest days. I left no tender chord untouched. I promised her to fully explain my position, when released, in a manner worthy of her love and our years of unbroken peace. It was a sad task, this letter! My own work, all this! And yet, I could not implicate Serge. With all my poor eloquence, I begged her to remember that I could not talk freely till we were out of "Holy Russia." I claimed her confidence and the old love. "Even your own interests and Justine's future are tied up in my safety," I reminded her. I was now ready to accept the Czar's hospitality. I awaited the summons. In an hour and a half a sleigh dashed up with the Captain, who took his post in the room. This was my formal departure—an honored guest—publicly dragged away under a military police guard! Major Trepoff returned and rang for the man, asking him to summon Mademoiselle Dauvray. She appeared. My goods were removed in silence. The Major spoke, with the perfect courtesy of a grand seigneur:

"Mademoiselle, it is my duty to take charge of all the effects in these rooms. As superintending generally this house, I now desire you to observe that I shall seal these rooms up and I desire no one to be permitted to enter them or touch any of the boxes left here,—which are now also sealed. That is all. I will remove the jewel case now!"

The governess rose and, quietly bowing, left the room with a cold, deadly sneer on her thin lips, as she noted my care-worn face. It seemed to say, "The right man in the right place!" I thought of Radzivill,—was his hostile ghost hunting me down? Major Trepoff directed the Captain and one agent to deposit the seized jewel case in the bank in his name. It had done its work. No one would tamper with it now. They departed. One agent was left in general charge of the house, with strict-

est orders not to converse with any one as to his official duty. Dimitri whispered to me, "Remember! Be patient! I will bring Vera up to see you now. We will then depart!" Major Trepoff was formally severe as he told the man to take my wraps and small articles down to the ante-room!

I spoke to Durand, who sat watchful of all these happenings. "Will you bring me a glass of water?" said I.

"Certainly,"—and she went down stairs. I walked then into my own apartment, where she followed me. She understood my ruse. As she returned, she whispered: "All our friends are safe. There is no other evidence against Hermione except that she devil's. Any papers found in the box are old ones picked out of former seizures. We have changed everything now. The governess is watched night and day. Adieu. I go to the fortress!" She quietly joined the agent. Dimitri returned and called her to his side.

"My good woman," said he, "I may need you. Give me your name and address. If you want to see me, here is my own card. Come any time. You may go now!" He tossed her a fifty-rouble note. Both of them had played out their farce of the day without detection. Even, Dauvray was foiled. The Durand thanked him profusely and left at once. I knew that the smart woman would improve her chances to use Trepoff. She, however, went to the fortress, taking her life in her hand. In a moment, the light foot of little Countess Vera came bounding up the stair. Throwing one sad glance around, she passed through Hermione's room and joined us. It was a sorry meeting. Her face was pale, her sparkling eyes were very tender, but the roses were coming back to her cheeks now;—for was her stalwart lover not almost well? Her own brave Serge! It would take more than the trifling flesh wound to break down that hardy sailor, whose lovely nurse was the cause of his rapid cure! A man could not but improve under such nursing! She hesitated timidly, for our relations were much changed!

"I am so sorry for you and so sorry for,—for,—that poor lady." I could see that my sisters had prejudiced



her against me. I was in suspicion. I bowed my thanks. I could not bear to breathe Hermione's name in scorn, and I had now no right to name her under the roof where my beloved sister suffered. For, they all thought I had a disgraceful secret to hide—an unmanly one. The girl's frank eyes were clouded with a mist of tears. "Poor, poor foolish woman! My God! To think of her there!

"I don't believe she is a bad woman;—we were all so fond of her!" she faltered. She was embarrassed and sought a confirmation in Trepoff's eyes. He bowed in assent. For he dared not open the Pandora box of our troubles. "Why don't they let her go away?" she cried, and she clasped her hands. "Ah! If I were only the Czarina—no one should suffer!" I believed her, but she, too,—like the gentle Czarina, might not know. "What can we do for you? What can we do to save her? I will help her! I know I can help!" said the graceful little beauty.

A sudden thought came to me! The opportunity to show my acumen! "Countess Vera," said I, gravely, "you alone can save her life! Your uncle Mouravieff is President of the Council. See him and beg Madame Komaroff to see him also. Some one put those papers in this lady's jewel case," said I. "She is no conspirator! It was a cruel fraud! A base fraud!" I urged.

"How could that be?" murmured the girl.

"I don't know," I sadly answered; "but all will agree it would only be a madwoman who would travel in Russia with such papers in a jewel case! I, of course, know nothing of any such dangerous stuff! She never did!"

Dimitri was watching me keenly. Did he suspect any one? He knew I was not fool enough to have such things around me.

"I will do all I can! Madame Mouravieff comes here to-day, and I will see everybody myself. She will go to her husband with me," was the reply of the warm-hearted little aristocrat. "You are right,—no sane woman would have such death warrants with her here!"

"May God bless you for your kindness! Pray think kindly of me and thank your mother and every one for their goodness to my Madeleine," said I. "You can see

she was trapped into coming here—for some low schemer to ruin the whole family name! It is a hidden revenge!" I could not bear to prolong this interview. I did not wish the bright-hearted child to know that I would be tried next day before a military court as a criminal. Walter Grahame, of the Bar—at the bar.

Major Trepoff said: "Now, let us go!" I kissed the sweet girl's hand, as she went down to her lover,—and—took my first step—prisonwards—with an indignant heart! I walked out through Hermione's rooms, to leave in public shame and dishonor, the house where her beauty and graces had won all hearts! So much for letting Captain Serge Zastrow get hold of that unlucky expired passport!—a sailor's rashness! The surroundings spoke eloquently of her dainty presence. I sighed in sadness, in bitter sorrow,—as I thought her lovely face would never again look out of those casements and see the blue Neva sweep to the sea,—the only free thing in sight! I tried to fancy the gliding Schuylkill, in its innocent winter loveliness,—with blue smoke rising on the banks from cheerful homes! I could not! Life has strange pathways, and the wandering feet of my Fair Unknown had led her in devious labyrinths, lured on by Pride, Passion, Hate, Love or some Fatal Jack-o'-Lantern from a palace to the damp casemates of a Russian prison. Cui bono?—and,—in my case,—a mistaken generosity had made a fool of me! A prayer was on my lips for "all prisoners and captives," as I descended to the salon. I had seen those pretty rooms the theater of so many fleeting joys, and now a theater of such bitter woe! "A most memorable visit—such a nice, quiet visit!" I growled. I could not believe yet I was in durance. Trepoff said:

"The sleigh is at the door! Now—Justine will join you here. She does not know yet you are going to the fortress. You must tell her yourself!" I sat down. My troubled sister Justine then came in slowly. Doubt and sadness on her brow. I greeted her with my warmest tenderness. Yet, I could not explain! Her eyes were tear-laden as she told me of Madeleine's great sufferings. She then began vague reproaches which almost broke

my heart! I could not bear this added misery, and I said, sternly:

"I am not able to tell you all now. You will know more before I see you again. My last love to Madeleine!" I turned to the door. The poor woman suffered keenly. For, the truth flashed on her now! She sprang forward and threw her loving arms around me. The touch of danger to me had melted the thin ice over her own dear heart.

"You are going!" she cried; "where?"

"To the fortress prison," I desperately said, as I unwound her clinging arms. I called to the delicate-minded Trepoff, who had slipped out of sight, "Ready, Major!"

"Taking him away? I shall go mad!" cried Justine Zastrow. The frightened woman threw herself on a chair. Her broken sobbing was the last sound I heard in that house, into which Hermione's light foot had brought such general misery. I wrapped myself in my furs and walked into the keen, cutting outer air, for that nice, agreeable officially-escorted sleigh ride. Major Trepoff gayly took a seat by my side. The outsiders must not know, of course. The driver lashed up the horses! With great consideration, my luggage was already sent another way. The Czar's people were certainly polite. We dashed up the Nadijenskaya drive, along the granite parapet of the river.

Merry parties flew by; officers and club men nodding kindly to Trepoff as they darted past, the ladies peeping out of their fleecy furs to smile on the popular soldier. We were supposed to be enjoying ourselves! Delightful fiction! I did not care to talk. The palaces and stately mansions were all passed by soon! The superb gardens of the Winter Palace were now desolate. Tender trees and the voluptuous statues were all comically swathed in twisted straw bands. Venus needed a bit of help against the Borean blasts. Pedestrians were briskly tramping along. Hundreds of snow-shovelers were clearing the sidewalks, as is the custom there for all the winter, as it amuses the populace and keeps them out of a warm prison. The cold air soon revived me! The blood

coursed through my veins like fire, and I felt more like a man. I began to be enraged. Action of any kind,—bracing up nerve and muscle,—was better than the horrid suspense of that doomed house! I could at least struggle—for my sadly forfeited freedom! Trepoff was grave and quiet. We were now approaching the boat bridge, and the streets were all deserted. I debated as to whether I should tell him now of my stolen letters! “No! Let him help her!” I decided. “I can wait!”

“The General asked me to say he was not able to say good-bye to you, or permit his wife or little Olga to do so! General Haxo’s orders were most strict! I violated my own duty to permit you to see your sister. Don’t blame them! There are spies in all these family houses. General Zastrow has to risk a good deal himself in the audience to-day at the palace. Haxo has had the first chance to report and prejudice the Emperor’s mind. He will do all he can. And,—every family here has its jealous enemies! It is the same the world over!”

“Major,” said I, “I am sensible of the trouble I have unwittingly brought on the dear old hero and all your family. But, I am in a false position. You know I suffer for you!”—he groaned and bowed his head. “I can explain by-and-by I am sure you would have acted better alone to try and save Hermione. Captain Zastrow was foolishly precipitate. We should all have understood the scheme better. Now, I can only plead that I am an American and a stranger and defenseless in as strange a land as Russia! This may avail me before the Court,—as it is nonsense to think of me risking any connection with the discontented. I hope the Czar will reign a thousand years!”

“You are right!” replied Trepoff; “I have often thought our country must be a queer one, full of pitfalls for foreigners,—and—you can urge this.”

“I certainly have found it so,” I remarked, with some little feeling.

“Well! you will not be kept long!” he mused. “If there was only as easy an ordeal for Hermione! My God! I shall go mad!” he groaned.

“By the way, Trepoff; had I better demand my lawyer

and help from the American Legation at once?" I said, as we trotted along. My journey was nearing its end. There was the fortress before me—my hotel!

"I think so. I will advise you to-morrow. I will be on hand early. Keep silent—for this afternoon. Don't speak if you can avoid it. They won't try to involve you! They only want her—poor darling!" His eyes blazed in a strange fire. I dared not follow his thoughts. I was silent. We were now on the bridge. The boats supporting the roadway, though heavily anchored, pitched and tossed wildly! The long bridge swayed, bending with its weight of snow in the chilly wind. We left the city shore and I looked back at the picturesque row of palaces and princely houses lining the river bank. I silently cursed its whole police and administrative system—on the wholesale plan. High, soaring over all, the golden dome of St. Isaac's was the central figure of the great landscape—one I was doomed not to soon forget! Ten minutes brought us to the end of the flying bridge, and then we glided swiftly down the crooked streets of the suburb which nestles around the great fortress! Yes! My hotel doors were always open—day and night! It was liberally patronized and kept up on a grand scale.

In twenty minutes more, we dashed on the wooden temporary bridge over the great moat! Before us was the arched gateway, with its guard house at either side. Grim artillery was peeping through every embrasure. Huge gaping gun-mouths. No way out! I sighed and dropped into gloom. From the parapet, over the three tiers of casemates,—Gatling guns, and Hotchkiss rapid-fire cannon frowned down on our pathway below. Gray-coated sentinels, with long skirts flying in the chilling breeze, turned up and down wearily on their lofty paths. Bronzed gun-barrel and twinkling bayonet twinkled in the pale gleams of an afternoon sun. Yes! It looked like a very nice, retired hotel—a quiet one—at any rate. The passers-by thought we were only a pleasure party as we dashed in! I failed to see my share of the pleasure materialize. I was not reported, at the gate, as prisoners usually are, but Trepoff returned the salute of the guard

and then ordered the driver to proceed to the Commandant's quarters!

The huge pentagon encloses two hundred acres, and once within its high granite-backed walls,—all external view is excluded! Magazines, the lofty keep, shot furnaces, covered ways, barracks, officers' quarters and the great Imperial church fill a part of the interior. The exercise grounds are ample. There is sufficient room left to parade and drill a whole brigade, as several thousand choice troops are always stationed here! From five hundred to a thousand political prisoners and suspects also crowd the three tiers of casemates, used for cells. My hotel was well patronized! The celebrated "lower tier" is always flooded when the river rises! A very convenient "clearing-house" process, in fact automatic. They tell queer stories of some of the boarders, men and women, too, being left there by accident. Many a poor devil's skeleton is found, still in the inexorable chains, gnawed to the bone by the ferocious marsh rats, driven into these lower cells, by the flood. It saves spoiling good paper with bad legal conclusions in some debatable cases! The case closes itself!

From this "hell on earth," where a summary court sits, on a signal sent through the underground wire and cable leading to the palace and departments, across the river, the wail of helpless humanity rises unheeded, and invokes the vengeance of a just God! These little affairs recall the Bastille, Bombay's dungeons and the hospitalities of Olmutz and Magdeburg!—all royal hotels! Over the arched entrance, the platform of rough planks, used for public executions, is always in place. A heavy beam is permanently fixed there! The hangman quickly places the fatal noose around the victim's neck, and then pushes off the helpless wretch to strangle to death. The regular old homespun Jack Ketch style suffices here! Within the marble church of the fortress, rests under the great pinnacled minarets, the Imperial dust of Russia's many dead sovereigns! Pomp and blazonry, silver lamp and jeweled shrine, with guards of honor pacing under the incense-perfumed groins, can not hide the historic horrors of the grim record of these marble tombs! But—

before one grim tribunal, we all meet at last, where argument is vain—and coronets are laid aside forever! Poison, the knife, strangulation and all violence, foul or open, have filled most of these proud tombs! The last huge sarcophagus holds a few fragments of what was once the mighty Czar Alexander, slain by the "Order of Madmen!" "Executed for his crimes!" was the grim nihilist record. The record of a crazed—desperate, homeless faction of the whole world's rebels.

Such is the gloomy interior of the fortress on the Neva, whose guns absolutely command the river! Here, trained hordes are ready to march out and tramp down insurrection by day or night! All "in the name of the law." The sleigh stopped. Trepoff said:

"Keep calm; your stay here will not be long! Do not lose your temper! You can do much to shorten your stay!" I nodded, but very feebly. I was a doubting Thomas. I was prepared in spirit, yet I shivered as I stepped out—for I was a free man no more! Across my mind darted the horrid tales, whispered to me, or read in fugitive books, of foul play here! Was I going to be a permanent boarder—or the victim of strange accident? Men strangled, women subjected to worse than death, and mysterious sudden sickness, causing a convenient mortality in the ranks of specially dangerous suspects here, recurred to me! I was an agnostic. We entered the orderly room. Major Trepoff sent up his own card. A sub-officer returned soon and conducted us into the presence of the artillery General Davidoff,—commanding this great stronghold. He was not outwardly a terrible object to behold;—for he was a refined, soldierly-looking man! He sat, with several juniors around him. The samovar and cigarette tray were not far distant. Major Trepoff officially reported. He briefly stated that he now delivered me to the Commandant, under the orders of General Ivan Haxo. The official circle mildly investigated me with curious glances. I stood mutely cursing the whole outfit, as the cowboys have it. The General spoke:

"I am very sorry to see an American in trouble here! Major Trepoff. I am ordered, however, to permit you

to see this prisoner at all times on your reporting to the officer of the day, here, your arrival and departure. You may now accompany him to the casemate. The Brigade Major will take charge now of the suspect."

I was about to speak. A warning look from Dimitri restrained me. I followed the officer, who touched my arm. I bowed to the General—who seemed to pity me. Trepoff silently accompanied us. A few score of paces brought us to the door of a flanking casemate of the great work! It faced the dark river. I had hoped that I would be able to look out. There was no portico to my hotel. It was severely plain. On arriving I had seen a half-score of fluttering white signals waved by despairing ones within,—in the wild, egotistic dream that some loved one might know of their location! The final desire of the doomed not to be utterly forgotten. The sentinel's musket rang, as he presented arms to the two field officers. I looked at the sun in farewell, and then submissively entered the cheerless stone vaults. I was now a guest! We stopped at a guard room, after climbing several stairs. A sub-officer then took down a key, after some colloquy in Russian, in which Trepoff quietly joined. He knew the Brigade Major well, and gave me a hopeful glance. We soon reached a double room, conducted by the jailer. It looked out on the river and was the chamber planned for two flank defense guns, and separated by pillars into alcoves. Not such bad rooms in my secluded retreat! It was decently furnished in barrack or hospital style. I noted, a severe style—an absence of gaudy ornament. The gun ports admitted light, being closed with windows. A sheer descent of fifty feet into the enormous ditch seemed to cut off all escape, yet bold and desperate men had here found liberty. at the risk of being dashed to pieces or drowned. Some were shot by the swarming sentinels on the outworks. So I had learned, on my tourist visit—some months before I became a regular boarder. I sat down. Trepoff interpreted, and asked me the usual formal questions: my name, age, nationality, and a general description was taken. These answers were compared with a copy of my passport, previously sent over; and I was now proper-



ly on the Hotel Register! The Brigade Major had returned to his office. All was over! I was really now a prisoner! Trepoff told me that I was only required to behave with ordinary prudence! My baggage would be sent to me at once,—when all the papers were examined and listed.

“Now, Grahame, what can I do for you,” said Trepoff, “for, I am free to act?” I spoke:

“Firstly, have a man set over me who speaks French,—if possible. Secondly, find out my charge at once,—the Minister is absent, and demand on my behalf, the privilege of sending for my lawyer, Federoff, and daily to the American Legation. Of course, I expect due time to prepare for my trial, such as it may be.” He nodded. “Last (and here my voice faltered), Major Trepoff, very strange things have happened in this place!” (He bowed quietly.) “Here is a letter for my sister Madeleine,—if I should be taken suddenly ill,—and here, my directions to you. I confide in your honor as a man and relative. There is a letter there to be sent to an address in Philadelphia.” I doubted if it would be even read, now. He sprang to his feet.

“I will act at once. You may count on me to the death! If anything should occur, I will see your sister Madeleine safely to Paris myself;—for the Zastrows might not want her to stay.” His eyes were moist.

“That is all,” said I. “Leave me, and—for God’s sake,—find out what has become of Hermione, and do what you can for her. Make Serge help you; he blundered us all into the trap.”

“It is true,” said Trepoff.

I shuddered as I thought of her helpless loveliness unprotected in that Golgotha. I threw myself down on the couch as Trepoff pressed my hand and then walked away. The door was locked now! I lay there watching the grim interior, until, in an hour the Major returned. “If he could only get me the right man!” I had a plan! With him was a steady-looking non-commissioned officer who was able to speak French. He was permitted to remain till taps would summon him to his rest, and would come daily to interpret, at call, and minister to

me. My baggage was now borne in. The thoughtful Major left some Paris journals and a box of cigars. Small comforts!

"Now for the news! Your charge, I find, is 'Uttering a false passport.' I can go away at once and get your lawyer and some one from the Legation, for my last duty is done. I will see the Grand Duke at once. Do you now write an official appeal for instant help from the Legation. You owe these little relaxations to the personal intercession of Count Mouravieff. He has already written to Davidoff. So you need fear no foul play," he smiled. "As for Hermione,—her charges are terrible!"—(and his voice was husky)—"High treason, false impersonation, and also, conspiracy! All these are drawn as heavy as they can be made. The hand of this devil Haxo hounds her down to death!" He broke down, and his eyes filled with tears. "If I were to kill him, now—it would not release her! She is well treated so far, and is on the same corridor with you! This I have found out. I have a secret friend,"—he winked at me. "Her woman is with her. No indignity will be offered her yet. She can not be saved, except by the sign manual of the Emperor! And,—I fancy Durand will hover very near her! Make no sign! Her court is ordered immediately after yours. Thirteen officers of rank are now under orders. General Obranovitch,—the very coldest man in our service,—is President. He was called the 'Curse of Warsaw,'—when he was the military governor there. The Poles all dreaded him. So, Walter, I will go now, and after sending my lawyer and an attaché here,—will go to the Mouravieffs, and see Vera, too, and return with a report." He seized his turban and cloak.

"Hold! Trepoff!" I cried, as he was at the door. "I am suffering innocently, for your mad love! I demand the return of my sufferings! You must play your part! You must, for the love of the woman who bore you, save Hermione from a disgraceful death! God will bless you for it! Rouse up General Zastrow and the ladies. Tell them you know she is innocent! See Mouravieff! The two Komaroffs are now deeply moved. Beg Vera

to aid us now! Don't forget your own influence with the Grand Duke! If Michael Zastrow was kindly received by the Emperor, the ladies may appeal safely to the Empress! Let me know how he was treated! He can say the whole thing was a mistake,—that her papers were lost,—and the expired passport was only used to help her out, not in!"

"By Heavens! That's a good point!" cried Dimitri. "I swear to you I'll not sleep, the moment you are safe, till I have exhausted every effort to save her. That French she devil is the real key to this whole mystery! When I am done as a witness in your trial, I am then free and can work for her. I will rouse them all. Don't forget! You must answer nothing at all about her! You can not be forced to criminate yourself, even here! You do not know! Say the passport was stolen from you by some servant! Now, I am off! Good-bye!"

The gallant fellow clanked away, with the white commander's cross he won at Plevna, shining on his manly breast. A kinder heart never beat in a soldier's breast;—and—I could see now in every glance how he loved the ill-starred Hermione!—and, I hoped for a modified sentence! As to her conviction—it seemed certain! I was alone! Conflicting emotions had exhausted me. This last sad news was crushing! That fair and graceful head soon to lie low in a dishonored grave! The beautiful inanimate form to be tossed into a ditch by the common executioner! Her thrilling voice rang yet in my ears! It was a monstrous dream—her present danger—and—only our joint effort could hope to save her! Though sadness and sorrow was her fatal dower, the fair woman, standing on the brink of her open grave, still fascinated me. Her impending fate was too horrible! No! she did not merit death! But—the innocent suffer with the guilty. I threw myself on the rough couch and then slept like a log! I told the warden not to wake me till Major Trepoff returned. The bed of the "Hotel de Neva" agreed with me! When hours had elapsed, I woke to the loud clang of the opening door. Trepoff entered with the lawyer and a young attaché of the American Legation. Lights and writing material were now brought.

Ah! Friends,—and help at last! But, I hardly cared for myself. My heart was beating Hermione—Hermione—Hermione!

The lawyer was experienced enough to listen and only watch the faces of the others! The attaché informed me, briefly, that the Minister was, as usual, absent! The frequent custom! The “*chargé d'affaires*” had already called on the Minister of the Interior, who sincerely regretted my position! He stated that my trial was now forced on to impress all foreigners with the importance of the passport regulations! Not to play with the Bear’s claws! He promised to use his good offices to mitigate any coming penalty! He frankly added that my immediate departure from Russia would be an instant condition. I smiled—I was but too willing! With regard to the case of Hermione, he declined even to speak! Her offense would be examined before a summary court martial! The Minister graciously ordered that the attaché should be allowed to attend and witness my trial, and then be called to establish my honorable American standing as an advocate. The young attaché had, however, a ball and supper to attend! He was eager to go. Slightly yawning, he said, carelessly, “Good-night; I’ll be on hand!”—and went away, promising positively to attend at ten next day—in time to give me all needed aid! I prayed that the party might be “a small and early” affair! The lawyer briefly ran over all the points with us! My defense was to be rested on my ignorance and inexperience! I was to ignore Hermione as much as possible also, in order to save her! It was decided that I should positively refuse to answer any questions tending to criminate her, as a conspirator—for of that I could know nothing at all. My advocate departed, so as to be with me early next day. His advice would be useless as regarded Hermione. The government would assign her military counsel. We did not wish my lawyer to delve into her history;—and no civilian could act. The advocate went away shaking his head in prediction of her ruin.

Trepoff and I were now left alone. Each of the departing gentlemen had been escorted out by the officer on

duty. I lit one of Dimitri's good cigars. He insisted that I should drink some wine and eat a little of the untasted meal. I began to be a little accustomed to my prison surroundings. So far, I was "all there!" Trouble had drawn us strangely together;—and Trepoff and I seemed to have a dual attachment for the lovely stranger. He said, as he smoked his cigarette, speaking with effort:

"You heard how gravely the Minister talked! Well, your own affair is only an administrative one! Hermione's is a case of the Privy Council itself! That is far more serious! We have one powerful friend in Mouravieff. Unless we can act with the utmost concert, though, Hermione is lost! These sentences of summary courts are often executed forthwith. They rush them along. The Czar might soften too late! General Haxo will push for an immediate conviction to vindicate his official reputation,—and—and—" (here Trepoff's voice was broken with sobs)—"to get any secrets the executioner can torture out of her, the night before. If he could break up a new nest of the order—he would get a half a dozen extra medals and decorations—and—her plunder." he groaned. My blood froze! I grasped his hands.

"Trepoff! do you tell me the condemned are delivered over in that way?"—my voice was almost a shriek.

"It is God's truth! Oh! If these walls could speak!" he ejaculated. "But, we must act—act! If we could only catch that French devil napping! The papers!—those cursed papers! I tell you, Grahame, I love that woman more than life! I did not know it till I saw her go,—like a silent queen—out to face inevitable death! She has a soldier's heart! God be with her! I would die to save her! My poor darling!" He buried his face in his hands—and sobbed like a child.

"We must save her yet, Dimitri! Tell me of my sisters! Are they still bitter towards me?" I said this to relieve his mind from the strain,—and mine.

"Madeleine is weak and low in strength—but better. She will be well in a few days. She knows nothing yet, and all at Zastrow's are now devoted to her. Your good Justine sends you this letter! It has been made clear to her that only your safety and your manly honor

has sealed your lips!" He gave me her welcome letter, which I tore open and eagerly read. It told me "Vera and Madame Komaroff, with our hostess, have been all this afternoon with Countess Mouravieff. The powerful Count will move heaven and earth, though he can't talk and promise much yet. He bears General Haxo no especial good will. I know Mouravieff will delay placing the seal of the Privy Council on Hermione's death warrant"—(he broke down again)—"till we have had all possible time to see the Emperor and the Empress. If we could only catch that governess! If we could only prove her devilish work!"

"General Zastrow's audience," I said, anxiously—for I had hopes from this.

"It ended satisfactorily, as regards our own family," said Trepoff. "We are safe enough. The Emperor received him very graciously, and said briefly and decidedly: 'Michael Alexandrovitch! This untoward trouble shall make no difference in my future care of your family interests. Strangers are often watched and preyed on in our country! There is nothing to seriously implicate your American relative, except his own personal folly,—and for that, he is only accountable to his sisters and to your family. I presume he was taken advantage of. You may say to Countess Vera Komaroff that her loyalty, her father's high prudence, and that of her mother, is undoubted. If they should be subjected to the faintest social annoyance, you can request an audience at once! As for the lady with the papers, that is a matter for the Privy Council. You know the laws as regards the Imperial family. The course of justice there is out of my hands!'—and he sighed heavily. And he then, dismissed General Zastrow, kindly stating that he should know when the papers would be on file in the case, save the private court record in the fortress. That is all we could hope for."

"Certainly," said I.

"That means the last moments of poor Hermione are near," he concluded, "unless we can get a special grace. But Zastrow is free to help me, and Serge, who is a

host, will be out, too, in a day or so. We will all work on Mouravieff! We must have all the ladies attack the dear Empress and the Czar. It is the forlorn hope! Now, Serge and I will be every moment at hand. Grahame, you are tired. You will need all your nerves to-morrow! It is near taps; I will go." He shook hands heartily, and then dismissed the sergeant. The jailer came to conduct him out and to lock me up. I showed Trepoff to the door with a great flourish, forgetting that I was the "Czar's guest!" He smiled at my easy politeness. A Philadelphian attribute! The turnkey pushed me back into the open door roughly. I was now a prisoner indeed! He grasped my hand very harshly. But, I felt a slip of paper thrust therein! I closed my fingers on it,—and the key turned. My one candle was nearly done! The writing lights had been all removed. I ran to its blinking glimmer. No danger of my burning up the capacious granite hostelry annoyed me now. I presume it was also heavily insured! A note from Hermione! Then the rough jailer, who only spoke Russian, was already under Hermione's magic sway! How could this be? If he would fetch, he would carry. Was it a trap? But, it was the dauntless woman's own graceful hand! I eagerly read the penciled lines! My heart, true to the demure Quaker girl, was wildly stirred by my extra sister's note! Then she had friends,—even here!

"I am well and not badly treated, yet. Trust the man! He is one of us! Write to me in the morning. Tell me all! Let me hear the news of your trial at once. Durand will work with Trepoff! Beg the ladies to see Count Mouravieff. He alone can save me from Haxo's snares. I wish to live for Dimitri now, if I can! If I am convicted and my sentence commuted to Siberia—our friends can try and help me! Don't work for a full pardon. It would fail! Only ask for a commutation and work for that,—instantly! Haxo will take my woman away the very moment I am sentenced! I swear by my mother's grave, I will strangle myself before I will pass into the dark horror of his foul hands! Death? Yes! Torture, —never!—and—still less—Dishonor!—No!—I will die





self-destruction. I asked her to answer at once. There is hope always, I urged. I hastened to complete this scrawl. It was not long before the friendly man returned. I gave it to him. He disappeared, and then returned in a few minutes with a little paper. It read:

"I have yours. Will follow your wishes. I have hope now! God bless you! Hermione."

While I pondered the man came in, and the service was removed. At eight o'clock the welcomed lawyer appeared. Federoff was an excellent business advocate. Like all superior Russians, he detested to meddle in criminal proceedings. I wished to use him in the property matters, after my release. We agreed at once not to be unduly controversial with the court. Federoff frankly said they must at least convict me, technically. He proposed to use his own well-known popularity in an appeal to the kind discretion of the court; and I felt that, after all, the Legation was behind me, too. So, this seemed the best to be done. He betook himself to his notes, and scribbled away, asking me brief questions now and then. I felt strangely—as a convict. In a short while, the earnest face of my gallant friend Trepoff was at the door. I saw that he had news of importance. He greeted me, and then, after a general colloquy with Federoff, we retired to a corner. He was more cheerful as he gave me a second letter from Justine. It was like the first, filled now with the returning tenderness of her dear heart. And so, she began to understand me at last!

Madeleine, my dear sufferer, was weak, but now gaining every hour. Her calls for me were met with the news that I was summoned away for a short time. The doctors forbade her even to read. So, she would learn to forgive, too! Trepoff then agreed to take an open letter to my sister Justine, subject to the glancing inspection of the Brigade Major, who was like Trepoff,—no hangman, but a soldier really worthy of the knightly weapon at his side. Not an armed policeman! The ladies had already achieved much. Count Mouravieff had agreed to keep the "Order of Council" in Hermione's

case on his own person, until after every last effort had been made. Already a special letter, under the sign manual of the Count, as President of the Council, directed General Davidoff, the responsible Military Commander, not to execute any fatal sentence without a personal report to him through the Brigade Major. "He is a true friend of mine," said the anxious Trepoff, "and I will know all, and fight for her to the last. We must save her!" "Dimitri," I broke in, "will you do me a great favor?" "Name it! If possible, I will!" he cried. "You can command my life!" "Then, listen! Hermione is safe until we have done our best for her, save for one thing. If sentenced, they will take away her woman at once. Something might happen to her before the final orders, you know!" I added, in a solemn voice. He hoarsely answered, "Yes!"—and his eyes blazed in a strange fire. "See Mouravieff yourself! Tell him the honor of the Komaroffs, the Zastrows, and his own family might be compromised by any pretended confession. Work on his feelings, and get an order from the Prime Minister Tolstoi, to be detailed as 'a confidential inspector' in the case. Get authority to remain with the prisoner, after the close of the trial, all the day-time, and to inspect her cell at night with the guard relief every two hours! That will prevent treachery, or—or—in-sult!" said I, my voice failing. "It will keep Haxo away from her!" He gazed at me in admiration. "Urge that my fate—an American stranger—demands all fairness!" "I'll do it!" he cried. "I will claim my privilege on this; I will not fail with Tolstoi! Mouravieff can demand to see the sentence fairly carried out!" The gallant fellow touched the white cross which gave him the right to an immediate audience of the Emperor. His blood had bought that on the plains of Plevna! "Good, then," I cried,—"leave me! Do this at once! Don't let them outwit us now! Beg the Brigade Major to put only trusty sentinels over her! You know what I mean!" "I will see him at once!" he joyfully exclaimed. "Now, for the only clue! You know the man who waited on you at the Zastrows! He came to see me—secretly—last night, in my rooms!" "I do!—a very decent fellow,

too," was my reply. "One of Durand's friends!" "He told me last night," said Major Trepoff, "that a strange workman had been seen fixing the locks and fastenings all around the house! The fellow worked when we were out, 'so as to not disturb us' with any noise." He paused and looked at me. "It is a little singular!" he said. A light was now being cast on the plot! I sprang up. "Now, he did not know this workman. He says he worked in the house for two or three days before the trouble! That fellow may have either opened the jewel box or been told to fit a key to it. If I could only find him, we might hope!" I saw the whole deviltry. The Dauvray woman had brought the man in. He was either a spy and a tool of the government, or she had fooled him into making a key or opening the case. So, Hermione had been betrayed. "This was the French woman's work, Dimitri, and we must watch her. This alone will save Hermione!" I replied. He struck his head with his clenched fist. "True; but, by God! what shall I do? What can I do? The time is so short!" "Should I confide all to him?" I thought now of Hermione in a dishonored grave, or tortured after a disgrace! "Dimitri," said I, "you love the woman! You alone can save her!" I said, slowly. He grasped my hand. "Tell me—quick?—what must I do!" said he, in a wild excitement. I was using all my poor legal wits now. "You have your man and sleigh her," I continued. "Yes!" he cried, as he grasped his cloak and turban. He was ready—aye, ready! "Send for that sewing woman who is sick. She was in and out of the rooms a great deal. She is devoted to Hermione. Now, get her here at once! I will write my ideas! You can read them later. Give her a note to General Zastrow. Let her take the man who told you this,—give them plenty of money,—and tell them not to stop day or night till they find that missing locksmith! You have all my money! Use it like water! Let them go into every shop in Petersburg and find him! There are not so many locksmiths' shops here. He is not very far away! The French woman has been spying in that house before! And, she had a key fitted, or stole Hermione's and had it duplicated!" "I know it!" he

cried. "Zastrow has been troubled by such fears! I know it!" he replied. "He tells me his papers have been slyly gone over—now and then! He will keep quiet as yet!" "Now, not a word to alarm her—not a word to Zastrow of this plan!" I continued, with growing excitement. "Get these two people at work!" "If I find him, then what?" he cried, in haste to go. I was now coldly revengeful in my heart—to punish Félice! "Then lure him quietly to your own rooms! Have Boris there, and you must force the truth out of him! Buy him; bully him,—all but kill him!" I said, bounding to my feet. "Hermione's life is in your hands! We want his confession, or the true story!" He did not hear the last words, for he was off. In a few moments he returned. His eyes were sparkling in a new hope. "I told my man to go at a gallop and get that woman! Now, for your affairs!"

He was happy to catch this fleeting chance of helping. "Never mind me! You must not alarm Félice a hair! But, have her watched always! Dimitri, I have but little time. Let me write!" said I. "Do you not think she may report to Haxo?" He started. "Perhaps!" he said. "I will know!" He sat down and communed with the lawyer as I pencilled a note to Hermione, with these matters briefly set out. I said I would try to have Durand see her, or at least her other faithful "sister of the order." I told her of Trepoff's plan to prevent foul play. It was all I could do. I had forgotten myself. I also wrote to Durand, telling her just what to do; and to get Hermione's wishes through the other woman, "and to hasten for a life's rescue!" I begged her for God's sake to let nothing prevent the finding of the man. I told her to notify Trepoff by day or night, leaving some one to watch the man so he could not slip away. "Use the whole order to save your 'Queen of the Forget-Me-Nots'" were my last words. I concealed the Durand note. The turnkey now announced the assembly of my court to Major Trepoff, and that an officer and guard was coming for me. I slipped the note for Hermione in his hand, wrapped up in a hundred rouble note; for Trepoff had brought some of my welcome money. He

clanked down the corridor, and returned in a few moments, his eyes dancing with joy at his windfall. I thanked God for the power of the universal god—"rouble, dollar, shilling, franc, mark, or lire;" it is all the same. Gold! magic gold! Money loosened locks even in Russia. I gladly discovered I had only a moment now. I called Dimitri aside. "Trepoff, here are two letters for my sisters!" He placed them in his pocket, and there was no interruption as he pocketed them. I eyed him as the soldiers approached. "Will you also give this note, unopened, to that sewing woman as soon as she comes?" He looked me steadily in the eyes. "For Hermione's sake!" said I—a last appeal. "Go at once!" "I will obey for her sake; but only for that would I leave you to-day!" he murmured, as he placed the letter in his card case and darted away. It was the only chance to get any original evidence for the partner of my trouble. "Now, when she comes, let her see the other woman!" I had rapidly whispered. "Hermione may know something of that locksmith. She may have seen this man repairing the house! She may know of the affair!" "Yes!" he had answered; "but I will have to take the woman outside to her. She must stay in my sleigh." "All right," said I, as I rose, and then followed Trepoff out. The officer of the guard had called for all my papers, and Major Trepoff had delivered them all to him. I was ready to face my judges now! Trepoff and the lawyer went off together. So, under the guard of a sergeant and an armed squad, I walked down the stony corridors to the Court Martial room. I fancied myself now a personage upon whom these honors were all too rashly thrust. In Philadelphia, I walked alone! I was so eager to further the work of Hermione's salvation that I forgot my imperilled freedom of action; for I felt that Haxo had no special thirst for my blood. I was only a plain every-day fool—in his eyes. I was instantly recalled by the cold, cheerless vaulted hall, an old magazine, from my day-dreams. This was the real prison scene—not a hotel about this. We entered a great room. Long tables, green-covered; smaller ones for the scribes and lawyers, were all ready. The guards and sentinels, with

orderlies, made up a grim display. All this for the benefit of Walter Grahame, Esq., who would gladly have waived it all. Seated at a side table, the young attaché of the American Legation watched me with a most languid curiosity. He looked a bit tired with his ball. At a signal, my lawyer sat down by me. Behind me there stood the grim sergeant, saber and revolver ready, as if I were Fra Diavolo, or Schinderhannes of the Rhine! Five superior officers sat waiting at the long table, their uniforms blazing with every medal and decoration of the service. Old men, hardened to the world, were they, most obsequiously obeying the behests of the palace circle, and the all-powerful police. These vicious, aged automatons seemed to be grizzled and ferocious demons to my startled gaze. It was not then a dream. General Obranovitch, at the head, sat like a hungry ogre. His saber was thrown across the table. His cold gray eye and furrowed parchment face was teeming with vindictiveness. He disdained taking any notes. His nod of the head was the cold indication of his casting vote as President. I could see that his mind (such as he had) was always "made up." A wooden idol, its hideous lips attuned to ejaculate "Death" at stated intervals, would have done as well! There was no unnecessary delay in bringing me "to book." The President of the Court did not swear in the Court or exhibit any warrant to judge a free-born citizen. He simply called out, in a harsh voice:

"All ready! Proceed! The affair Grahame!"—so my lawyer interpreted.

The Judge Advocate read, in French, the charges, which were brief. "Walter Grahame, an American," was charged with "uttering a false passport"—in certain long-winded periods. A written copy of the charge was now handed to my lawyer. "Has the accused counsel?" cried the grim old President. Federoff arose and bowed respectfully. I waited my turn now. "Stand up!" said the Judge Advocate to me. I rose in silence. "Walter Grahame, American traveler, how do you plead? Guilty or not guilty?" said he, mechanically, as if he cared not what my views were on that subject—so vital to me.

"Not guilty!" I replied, and sat down. I groaned at the outlook. "I have the honor, General, to except to the jurisdiction of the Court," said Federoff, rising. "This man is a foreigner, a traveler, ignorant of the laws and internal regulations of the land. He cannot even speak the language." "Overruled! Proceed!" instantly answered Obranovitch. Pens were now scratching and papers rustling. It was clear that my innings would be very trifling. The Judge Advocate turned then to an orderly. "Call Colonel Luboff!" He appeared shortly, and was then sworn. He briefly testified as to my name and station. The passport was handed to him and identified. He described the lady with me at the Zastrows. He swore to my treatment of her as my sister in society, and her arrest. He gave his testimony with quiet coldness and no feeling. He described the double arrest, and said the house dvornik had reported her as my sister, and handed in a false passport of my family name. The Judge Advocate paused.

Federoff, in cross-examination, asked if I was specially made aware of the stringent regulations of the Bureau. Luboff admitted I had only acted as the lady's brother, and had not personally handed in the fraudulent paper. "Did you ever question him directly as to the relation?" pleasantly said Federoff. "I did not. I presumed her to be the prisoner's sister. They so acted at General Zastrow's. I was so introduced to her. He was in the house at the time." "That is all, Colonel," said my judicious advocate, after Luboff had acknowledged we had committed no other criminal act in his presence, or to his direct knowledge. "Only personated the brother of an 'extra sister!'" Several of the Court grinned maliciously at me. An official of the Interior Department was called, who testified to the regular receipt of my own legal passport from the Zastrow mansion, accompanied with the other. No cross-examination, he soon withdrew.

The frightened "dvornik," or head porter, of the Zastrow mansion, was now called. I was afraid for Serge! If discovered, we would all be injured. He testified to receiving and returning my passport in the usual manner. He admitted making the reports called for by law,

and said the lady's passport had been handed on her behalf to him. He forgot by whom. No cross-examination.

I breathed freely. Serge was at least safe now!

General Michael Zastrow appeared. He was sworn, and briefly testified to the facts of our arrival, our stay, and our arrest. "You supposed the other prisoner to be this man's sister?" grunted out General Obranovitch, with some interest, speaking in a friendly tone. "Certainly!" said the old veteran, never raising his eyes. "Did she act suspiciously in your house?" asked a member. "Never!" said the witness. "She was extremely correct in all her behavior."

"The real sister of the prisoner is at your house now with Commodore Zastrow's wife — also his sister?" roared General Obranovitch, who was deaf, and hasty in his manner as well.

"Yes, General," said Michael Zastrow, unwillingly.

"They have both correct papers?" asked the Judge Advocate.

"Yes, sir," replied my late host. The prosecution paused.

"Did the prisoner act wrongly, in any other way, at your home?" said Federoff.

"Not at all. His conduct was very proper," rejoined my friend.

"That will do, sir," said my counsel.

General Haxo was the next witness. He was as unmoved as a bronze statue. And, I shuddered, to see him in the box.

"Do you recognize the prisoner, General?" said the anxious Judge Advocate.

"I do. I met him in calling at the house of General Zastrow. I knew too when he entered the country at Eydtkuhnen," quietly said Haxo. "He has had some legal business here."

I started. "Had he stolen my letters to fight the claim?"

"Did you speak to him or his companion about this passport?" was the next query.

"I did not! I did not think they knew my functions,"



was the cold reply. "I was paying my respects to the Countess Komaroff. I had his name on my private list, and hers—as his sister—American visitors—so reported to me."

"Did the prisoner willfully utter a false passport?" was the succeeding question.

"He did, or she did, with his knowledge," replied the General, decidedly. My friends exchanged glances, and the young attaché lifted his head.

"How do you know this?" obsequiously continued the prosecutor.

"I thought at first he had been victimized by some beautiful adventuress. I had reason to suspect the woman with him. I watched them. He persisted in taking her out in society, as his sister. I directed them to be followed and watched. On their proposed departure, I refrained from arresting them, until I was aware of the real character of the woman with him. That is a serious public concern. The coming of his real sister from Paris and Madame Zastrow, who are innocent of all wrongdoing, made it my duty to arrest the two prisoners; for there was one 'extra' sister in this small family!" he grinned.

"Who is the woman arrested with the prisoner?" said the Judge Advocate, timidly. I turned as I heard a sigh. It was uttered by Dimitri! Trepoff's forehead was knotted in agony. He tried to be calm. And there was a hush in the room as General Haxo said, triumphantly:

"She is a most daring and dangerous state criminal!"—and then, he turned a glittering eye on me. "I believe the prisoner knew it, and screened her willingly."

All the old Dracos at the board looked up. They sniffed blood. My brain reeled. "Did he really know who she was? He was now condemning her in advance. Ah! the wolf bided his time." For what fell purpose did he hound Hermione down?

"Did the prisoner commit any other overt crime?" was the final query.

The whole court waited in strained attention, and I was on the tenter-hooks.

"Not to my knowledge. He was, I think, only a tool

of a very subtle woman! He was forced into his foolish rôle, perhaps, by fear of exposure, for his detection was certain. His great folly was not advising with his Russian friends. He should have known that she was only an adventuress, or worse! I watched him to save him, as I do not like to arrest innocent travelers, Americans especially, even if they are socially imprudent; for I feared he might be found in strange quarters. When she forced herself on a great family, she was within my reach always. I wished to simply bring her before the law, and not annoy my esteemed friend General Zastrow."

"That will do, General," said the flattered prosecutor. "We will, of course, hear the whole facts—in the other trial."

Haxo bowed, with a cool, wicked gleam in his eyes. Federoff's eyes met mine. I shook my head. I did not wish to enrage this wolf who thirsted for Hermione's blood; for she was clearly in his power. Did I dare to doubt her truth to Trepoff? No! He evidently wanted to get the record right, to use against Hermione with the Council and Emperor. He feared Nicolas Mouravieff's fine hand, not the too facile court. For God help her! I knew in my heart that he wanted to get her in his power in those dark, lonely shades.

"No questions, General," said Federoff, simply. And then, Haxo left the room, his sword ominously rattling. The Judge Advocate was evidently surprised. Was there nothing else? Here was a man, simply imposed on, who consented to a social fraud! Nothing more against the disciple of William Penn—and my friends felt safe!

"That is the case!" said he, bowing to the President.

Federoff then called the attaché. He testified to my unexceptionable general conduct and high standing in America. He stated officially, who I was. He said also that my lawful sister Madeleine and Madame Justine Zastrow were at the General's, and both were persons of the highest respectability.

"Do you know anything of the other prisoner?" was the only cross-question. The young attaché languidly

denied "the soft impeachment." He was pumped out. "Nothing!—nothing whatever!" said the diplomat, as he departed.

There was a bustle as I was then sworn to make my voluntary statement. Federoff drew out the fact that I was ignorant of any breach of criminal law, the passport system being a nullity elsewhere, except in Turkish states, and that the old paper had disappeared from my desk and was used unknown to me.

"Do you know who the other prisoner is?" said my lawyer.

"I do not," I firmly replied. All were interested now. There was a craning of necks in my direction. Now, came on the racy dessert to these dry bites!

"Why did you act as you did?" was the next question.

"I was quietly leaving the country to avoid further trouble," I replied. "I only intended to help the lady past a mere troublesome formality. The false position was originated by General Zastrow assuming her to be my sister, before I came from Wilna. We were about leaving for Warsaw peaceably. She was to quit me at the frontier, and I proposed to join my sister in Paris. I know nothing of her history or any unlawful designs—only that she needed help."

"Did you write or telegraph your sister Madeleine to come to Petersburg?" said Federoff, with a cautious glance.

"I did not," I replied, simply. "Some one forged my name to both letters and telegrams addressed to her. My mail has, also, been suppressed or stolen! It must have been done by persons of power and great skill!"

"Do you know who did it?" continued Federoff.

"I do not," was my closing answer. "I have not the faintest idea! All I wish is to get out of Russia—forever!"

There was a general horse-laugh. I was asked but one cross-question, and, on my declining to answer, on the right not to criminate myself, the Judge Advocate shrugged his shoulders, and said, "That is all!" I felt my soul lifted up. I deserved an acquittal. Federoff rested my case. In any fair court, I was as fairly cleared

as a man could be. The Judge Advocate then addressed the Court with a really able summing up. I took a professional pride in seeing that he thoroughly knew his business. Federoff followed, briefly urging the ignorance of travelers as to the serious nature of the police control. He referred to my ignorance also of the language. He pointed out that I was foolishly imprudent—only that. He explained my apparent deceit by my desire to get away at once and not wound the feelings of my friends by any discovery. As far as I was concerned, no infractions or other guilty knowledge was charged—merely a passive deceit—a chivalric—a natural one. He did not refer to Hermione, but urged my acquittal. He dwelt on America's distance and our gross unfamiliarity with all the forms of Russian law. He begged for acquittal or a merely technical judgment, and then referred to American natural sympathy with Russia. "It would be madness for such a man to meddle here, and, this gentleman's character makes it impossible!" he closed. I at once acquitted myself.

The Court was cleared. I spent an anxious, a maddening half-hour, alone in the anteroom. Trepoff was called away by a messenger. This brightened me, for I knew now Durand had arrived. He returned soon, and whispered to me, "It's all right! I gave her the note. The other woman is with her now!" This, too, was good news. My plan would be worked with energy. If the man could be found, we had at least a basis to work on—for a mitigation. Loud talking and argument was heard in the Court Martial room. They were at work deciding my case. It recalled me to my being "on the broiler." In a few moments, the clamor ceased. A sub-officer then called the guard and we were all ushered in. My heart thumped away violently. Would I become a regular boarder in the granite casemates? The row of ghouls was now in correct order, and a ghastly lot they were. General Obranovitch's wicked eyes gleamed with a flickering brightness. They seemed now to me to be "man-eaters." I had lost my glow of manly defiance; for they were ready "to talk business in my case."

"Stand up!" cried the Judge Advocate. I struggled to

my feet. "The prisoner is found guilty!" said the General. "Sentence at ten o'clock to-morrow!" And, the Court filed away in laughing knots of happy Muscovites to their comfortable table, I have no doubt. The officer touched me on the shoulder. The Court had broken up most gayly, the military hyenas congratulating each other. They wended their way to the caviar, vodki, and breakfast, so well earned. They had "polished the American off very easily." And, Hermione! Ah! my God! that was an agony! In silence I was reconducted to my lonely cell. Federoff remained with me a few minutes only. He hastened away to work for my interests. An old friend of Monsieur de Giers, he would at once see him and beg the remission of my sentence on grounds of international comity. "You are simply a formal example!" he said. "Don't worry" But I did! I thanked Federoff and asked him to come and advise Trepoff, as a friend merely, in Hermione's case. I saw he was frightened. He shrank from publicly touching this as an advocate. It was too dangerous. Ah! she was doomed! I soon received a very fair breakfast, and then, Trepoff went down to see the sewing woman. Hermione's servant was permitted to return to her, for a list of some necessities. This Trepoff had told me on his return. The good Durand had ascertained now all the poor beauty's wishes. I knew how vital this was to my caged falcon. Trepoff sat down and wrote to General Zastrow, who had escaped from the court without a word to us. He told him to do all he could for Durand. An order for abundant money, and some direction to Trepoff's servant completed her outfit. Trepoff gave her his card, with a note which would protect her from all ordinary interference. The driver was out of the fortress already, and, dashing along, well on the way. And we must find that man! It was our Waterloo! I was satisfied and disinclined to talk. My own outlook was seemingly gloomy enough. Sentence was hanging over me! The lukewarm behavior of the local United States officials did not argue any peculiar interest in me. If another round of "parties" would be brought on the tapis, I could neatly be executed, while the attachés sipped wine

and whirled those pretty Russian girls. We ate some breakfast. Trepoff decided to depart, as he wished to see Count Mouravieff in my behalf. He hoped my sentence could be commuted. The most important arrangements as to Hermione rested also with the kindly old dictator. "I want you free, Grahame!" cried Dimitri, "to get even with these fellows and to help me save her! I want you out!" Promising to return next morning, and to effect my substantial pardon, Trepoff would be free then to give himself up entirely to the quest for the locksmith. His main duty now was to watch over the dauntless woman, who was looking out of the deep embrasure of a prison cell. And, how many days had she to live? I dared not even think of it. In her vigorous flower of life,—loving and loved,—to die! I was beaten down and wearied out. Intrigue, deceit, craft, cruelty, and treachery had made my life only one daily battle since I crossed the frontier. But, I came to battle with just such elements! I could only blame myself, it was true.

Dimitri went away, assuring me that Serge, the General, and himself would sign a joint statement as to my own case. He would ask Count Mouravieff to hand this personally to the Emperor. The round robin would delicately hint that I drifted by gallantry into a foolish corner. It was useless to provide further for my sister Madeleine and Justine Zastrow. They had every help and comfort, and were free to go. It was clearly General Haxo's policy to have them treated with ostentatious official consideration. The moment I was rangé, they could go to Kiev, or my Maddy be sent back to her friends in Paris. I fancied she did not care for a Russian winter. I pencilled a few lines to Hermione, telling her all my own gloomy news. I feared treachery now, but I was reassured when the turnkey brought me an answer. He had nearing visions of more of my hundred rouble notes. If I did not have my freedom, I at least could spend my money. I have never failed to be able to get rid of my surplus. Hermione wrote at once; for the way might not long be open.

"Durand and my secret friends know all now! They will co-operate for everything needed through her. Every square in Petersburg will be at once examined by our order! The brothers also on the trail will not sleep night or day! Trepoff and Serge can alone save me by finding that one locksmith! They must gain the Empress' heart, through the two ladies! She is an angel of kindness when she is reached by worthy sufferers! Thanks for Trepoff's plan, I shall die a free woman—not a poor, degraded outcast, crushed under the rack with the knout. I can escape them—I have the means. My heart is with you. God speed Trepoff! I thank God no clouds rest on my friends. If it were not only for Dimitri's future, I would go to the doom with sealed lips! But my foolish woman heart tells me to live for him—now! Trust the messenger; the man is true.

"Hermione."

I dragged out the afternoon hours and slept while the glimmering battle lanterns lit up the snow-covered walks where the bayonet of the Cossack guards the helpless victims of a stern autocracy.

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## CHAPTER X.

### HERMIONE'S JUDGMENT — ON THE BRIDGE — A DEAD WITCH — FOUND AT LAST.

Morning came; the gun-fire awakened me, now a convicted man. Under my casemate, the ringing bugle sang loudly. The soldiers turned out for drill as soon as the daylight struggled through the gloom. Poor brutes, only trained for slaughter in another's quarrel!

The reveillé bore my thoughts far away to a free and happy land. I was recalled from my slumbers—from a blessed vision of my peaceful home on the Schuylkill—and the face of the dreamy-eyed Quaker girl whom I now feared to meet. So I fell to "Dreaming the dream that martial music weaves!" I was roused by the en-

trance of my turnkey. He soon served me a good breakfast, in which my hundred rouble note was evidently a potent factor; or, was it only to "brace me up" for my sentence? The Sergeant, who spoke French, busied himself with my toilet. He acted as volunteer valet. He also scented various roubles in the distance.

This was the day of sentence. I was anxious to have it all over, as I wanted time to have the search for the locksmith a success before Hermione's trial. I hoped to be relieved before that; for I naturally hoped for a mitigation. I was too insignificant for Haxo's fine work. I felt they would not try her till my sentence had been confirmed. I was sure now that my punishment would only be a period of local detention—not a visit to the Siberian wilderness. But would I emerge soon enough to aid Trepoff? Would I be immured here while fair, unfortunate Hermione, still a mystery, died almost in my hearing—and I not see her again? There was madness in this idea. If detained, I would have my sister Madeleine go on to Paris at once. I could join her by steamer, if released, after I had helped the "sister" so strangely adopted. I must see her again, in any case! I would have Trepoff bring me some of my money and heavily bribe the turnkey. There were but two guard inspectors—one at noon and one before taps. Money, a fat concrete lump, might do its work! The jailer brought me a note hidden in a loaf of bread, the safest prison mailbag.

"All is well! Send me in some paper and writing materials, if you can. I want to write for you the story of my life. Let me hear from Trepoff. Don't ask him to try to see me before my trial. He might be seen and compromised. When will I be tried? Don't relax a moment! I will certainly be convicted. I fear the worst now! After I am judged, if Dimitri can work his way to me, let him come. Your faithful

"Hermione."

I sent to the lonely one all the materials I had and replied:



"Trepoff will be here soon. I will send more paper soon. Finish all your writing to-day, and let me have it. It is the only safe way. I will seal it. Trepoff will keep it sacredly. You may be tried to-morrow, or next day. They will search your cell then. So, beware of all. Keep up hope!" Grahame."

This was safely dispatched. In a half-hour the Major came over from the capitol. He was cheerful. "I have them all at work, like honey-bees! And we will make a strong fight!" I told him I must have at once a large sum of my money, in bills, and also more writing material. The latter was at once obtained. The cash he would soon bring back in fifty and hundred rouble notes. He suspected its proposed use, but was silent. I learned that my sisters were now well. He gave me kind letters from Serge and the easy-going old General Zastrow. None of them knew of my conviction, save the General. All was going on well, save the quest for the smith. Mouravieff had promised all we desired. The gallant soldier showed to me the order and sign manual of Count Tolstoi, that he, alone, should have charge of the prisoner, as representing the "Minister of the Interior" up to the last moment. "This prevents the 'extraordinary!'" solemnly said Trepoff. This sad privilege was at least secure. She would die like a human being, and not be sported with in her agony. "And the locksmith? We must connect Haxo and the woman with the trick!" "No news yet!" was the despairing reply of the Major. "The two are hunting over the whole city. The governess is watched night and day now by our spies—people we have put in the house! So far, she has not left the mansion. Ah! she is a sly one—a safe one!" Trepoff had as yet no solid proof that she was a paid police spy. He believed it firmly, but had no direct evidence. I did not dare to admit that Hermione and the "Durand" had been systematically outwitted by this quiet governess who worked her wonders in silence. "Ah! she must have had help and outside orders!" I groaned. She was Haxo, as far as we were concerned.

I was summoned for my sentence. The escort officer

and guard reconducted me to the hall. Trepoff went also. The Court was hastily convened. The Judge Advocate read the brief proceedings. They were signed and approved by the Court and President. It was a very brief recital. The stern old General Obranovitch made a sign to the guards. I was roughly ordered to stand up. I did so, with a tremor of rage. I disguised a choking feeling of helpless anger. The old President read from a slip; and I realized how far chivalry could lead a man out of his own bailiwick. "The sentence of the Court is that the prisoner, convicted duly, according to law, shall be imprisoned in the fortress for three months; then, publicly expelled from Russia under a police guard!" I heard the whole thing in a dream. Lost! I was reconducted outside. The guard escorted me to my casemate. Trepoff and I did not speak until we were alone. This sealed the fate of Hermione, unless I could get clemency. What hope for her — the sweet culprit! What was to be done! We sat with throbbing hearts, in sorrow. "I will see General Davidoff, the Commandant; and, as soon as the papers reach him, which will be at once, I will then, on your behalf, write an instant petition for a commutation of the imprisonment! I will have my old friend the General officially recommend it. I will get also Monsieur de Giers and Count Mouravieff's recommendation, and then go at once to the Premier Tolstoi! I will ask the Grand Duke to aid. The whole family will join! In the meantime, till it is granted, I shall beg Davidoff not to put you in any closer confinement than this! Let me work this up!" He left me and I communicated the news of my sentence to Hermione. I wrote very briefly, with words of cheer. I did not dare to trust myself to believe them. And to-morrow, she would be cut off from me. I prepared brief notes in answer to my letters from the friends. I urged the now-relenting Zastrow to aid in my case at once. I would agree to leave Russia as soon as my sister was well enough to travel. I prowled around until Dimitri returned, and I learned that General Davidoff had kindly granted all his requests. I was now in the Commander's hands and out of

the orders of the Court! They had sentenced me as heavily as they dared. Being a military court, and I being a civilian, I could not be legally fined by them. The imprisonment was evidently given in the hopes I would serve it out, and thus be powerless to help Hermione. Evidently, General Haxo was sure of her now! Trepoff prepared to go. How long had we left to work in? I feared to ask. "Dimitri," said I, with the greatest anxiety, "when will Hermione be tried?" His eyes were haunted with a burning sorrow now. He gazed hopelessly at me. "To-morrow at ten!" was his reply, in a hollow tone. "My God! Redouble every effort! You must be here, for her safety; but leave your servant to stay on watch at the house. Bring the sewing woman or the man if they have any news! Without that locksmith, without a hold on the Dauvray, we can never baffle Haxo!" "I will do it," he pledged. He then left, taking the letters and promising to get me the money now—the great lever. I whiled away the weary day impatiently. When evening fell, I tried in vain to read or pass my time. Every hour rang out like a knell. Hermione's face was ever before me, in pleading suffering. My God! I was tied down to the stake! I would be haunted my whole life by her sad memory! Before the Tartar bugles sang "taps," I received a sealed packet from the woman I could not see—through the warden. Its receipt caused me to hand him my last ready fifty rouble note! He smiled wishfully. How could I tell him that I must see Hermione? I dared not trust any one but Trepoff. I only could confide this even to him—my plan—when Hermione had faced her judges. I would then try the heavy money bribe myself, as a last resort. At least, I would know her last wishes, and accept her trusts of honor—perhaps her messages—from the grave.

The packet was endorsed as follows:

"To be read only, at my request, after conviction. In case I can communicate, then read this as soon as possible, after my death. The sealed letter within has my last wishes—to be opened in case of my death. I re-

quest Walter Grahame and Major Trepoff to countersign the will and then have the bank notary certify to my signature. He knows it. It is only a matter of justice. Keep this authorization and show it to the notary.

“Hermione de Vries.”

Around it was a slip:

“Let Trepoff keep these papers for you till you need them, or until after I am dead. They might be stolen from you here! They are, then, a joint trust. H.”

I concealed the papers till the morning would give me a chance to give them quietly to Trepoff. He could have them deposited for me at the American Legation. They would be safe there! I knew well why my official friend there had abstained from personally mixing too much in my trial. He feared, perhaps, the ill-will of the authorities and his recall. It might interfere also with his diplomatic promotion. Still, all my papers would be safe there, sealed under my name! I was done now with all possible precautions. The morrow would usher in the first day of Hermione’s dreadful ordeal; and, alas, I feared it would be a stern and short proceeding. I fell asleep with prayers on my lips for the poor woman, who was on the brink of destruction. Gun-fire woke me again a weary man. Weird sad dreams had haunted me all night. I tossed and troubled my poor brain, with thinking over every element of help for the dauntless woman alone there in that dreary cell! Two things were at once available. Money and influence. The last resource, was our united mental ability to throw some light on how those papers got in the box. To baffle Haxo; for her real crime was undetected—the cipher deliveries. Money—yes! I would use it liberally, and promise even more. Yes! that was the bait to tempt a Russian official of the lowest orders. Greed and need go together. Had Hermione available money? Could she promise a large contingent reward? No! I would arrange her resources to keep her, if imprisoned a long time. Money is useful in every prison. As she knew the “bank notary,”—an independent sort of

international business functionary,—I was sure that she could arrange to use her treasure to great advantage, if she lived to need it. If only I could keep up a line of communication! But—for how long? Influence! We had done all we could till the dead issue of pardon or no pardon was met. The mere possession of Nihilistic documents in Russia brings a death sentence, perforce. The sly French spy had done her work well! That was a concrete fact. We had to meet it flatly. Now, to surround all the actors in the trial with friends of ours who would spy out a joint in their official armor. Two people were the central figures. Their collusion must be shown! The cool Haxo was the first! If we could only catch him napping and prove that he set a vile trap! If he went beyond his duty to lure in a prey he thirsted for! This might save Hermione—at the last! Then, the false governess! Her rôle was the most hated in Russia. A female Judas, a “mouchard,” and, a household traitress! Could we prove that? I hoped the most from the liberal use of money now! Even a political prison has its “buyable” subordinates! The “order” did all it could to keep spies and friends among the fort garrisons, the coast artillery, and the navy at Cronstadt. Money would do much among these poorly paid military and naval people, as discontent broods quickly and strangely among soldiers and sailors. They are all poor and needy, and also linger cooped up in a tantalizing nearness to all the expensive pleasures of large cities and seaports. Yes! now the voice of money would be potent. As for the Nihilist emissaries in the prison and fortress, they were far safer there than wandering in Petersburg or Moscow. They had here no great force of “mouchards” and household spies always ready to run them down. Their very presence was an implied proof of loyalty; for the strong prison watched itself. Even janissaries get tired now and then. Soldiers and sailors seldom take kindly to giving up the smaller criminals. Punished freely always themselves, they have a general sympathy for all suffering prisoners. It is the world’s kindly creed! So, it did not astonish me to find some devoted socialists even in the great fortress of Petropaulosky. Under the

very nose of the Russian police, who looked over them in ignorance—were men who frustrated the cut and dried official dirty work planned out. Breakfast brought Trepoff to me. He was outwardly calm and had good news as to my own sentence. It would almost surely be remitted; but only after a later review of the case and some little formality! Besides, General Haxo did not hesitate to request the Minister of the Interior to keep me locked up till after Hermione's trial. Reasons of state! The General was unconsciously helping Hermione in one way.

"Here is your money," said Trepoff, as he handed me several packets of notes. Each one of these would have made an ordinary peasant rich for life. This was to me now concrete power! I thanked him, and at once concealed them. He returned all my official papers which had been taken from me at my trial. General Davidoff, with great courtesy, had sent them over to me! A letter from Justine Zastrow told me "all was well," on the Admiralty quai. I had assured her I was in no real danger now. She was preparing, at my suggestion, to leave Russia for a long visit, as soon as Madeleine was better and I free. We would take our little family frolic "over the border." Madeleine knew as yet nothing of my actual whereabouts. No needless excitement for her! The rest of the friends were faithful; only waiting for a tangible basis on which to present their prayer for the pardon of Hermione, or a mitigation. And our detectives? As to the governess, so far she had only left the house while driving an hour or so with her little pupil. A strange man had called and asked the "dvornik" for her, and he had sent in only to find that the French woman was away! That was all the current news. A poor barren prospect so far. "Dimitri," I asked, "when are the witnesses ordered to be here, ready for the trial?" "All will come at eleven o'clock!" he replied. It was a frightfully close race for a life. "That woman will surely communicate with the man who called on her before she comes here to-day," said I. "Just what I foresaw," answered the Major. "And I have left our two spies to watch her every movement,

and then follow her up! If she meets any strange man or makes a suspicious stop, one of them will report to us. The other will follow the party and keep an eye on him also. My servant is now shadowing the party, to help and get them a sleigh, or to come over here and call me out! I tried to think of all!" he wearily said.

"This is our last and only chance," I replied, as I went to the window. The outlook was mournful. Dark, leaden skies, a few sea birds lazily wheeling here and there over the icy flood and wailing with harsh, discordant cries. The wind was whistling keenly by. Snow-laden roofs, with frosted pinnacles, rose far beyond the river, where the "outside prisoners" lived. It was a sorry prospect! What difference while in Russia whether I was inside or outside of a prison? Tyranny was talked of everywhere! I turned back heart-sick. The whole land was a prison to me.

"I will go away half an hour before the hour of assembly to the court. I may find out some new points. I will send you back a note by my man. Stay! I will leave some bundles of papers here, so that I have an excuse to send him over to you!" It recalled me to a grave trust! "Papers! Yes! Hermione's papers! I must secure them." I had enveloped and sealed them all with an indorsement to have them delivered to my sister Justine or Trepoff in case of my death. I inclosed a letter to her, to let Dimitri Trepoff alone read them all! I bade her also act under his guidance,—after studying them herself. For, now I feared even for my own life! These I gave to Trepoff, who promised to see them deposited in the Legation safe, with a receipt in my name and my sisters. There they were safe from police search until the opening hour should come. Tramp! tramp, up the stone stair, came a guard.

"What is that, Dimitri?" I cried, in a sudden new tremor. "It is a guard to take Hermione to the courtroom," said the Major. And, as he thrust my packet in his inner breast pocket, he rebuttoned his uniform coat and quickly grasped turban, sword and cloak.

"I am off!" said he, breathlessly. "I fear I might do some crazy act here,—and—ruin all!"

"One moment, Trepoff!" I cried; "do they bring her down here? Down our corridor?" My heart was quivering strangely.

"Yes!" he said, impatiently.

"Wait, then," I cried; "wait till they come! I may see her,—if you go out,—as they pass here. For God's sake, wait!"

"That is true," he groaned. "I'll stay,"—and he motioned to the old Sergeant on watch, who quickly unlocked my cell door. Five minutes seemed to me, then, an age! Down the hall came the heavy cadenced tread of the guard. Trepoff's hand was on the door. Nearer, nearer, now the marching feet sounded! It was like a death-knell to our slender hopes!

"Now!" I whispered. He then quickly flung wide the door with a clang. The startled soldiers turned aside, seeing a decorated officer of high rank. That "white cross" was a badge of the highest standing! In the midst of the guard, clad in dark robes, her heavy fur cloak drawn close around her, Hermione stood as one inspired! Her hands were tightly clasped! The dark, lustrous eyes shone out deepened with a tender light! Her beautiful, noble face was as pale as marble! Ah! God! what a vision of pallid beauty! Only a Murillo could render the sad, devoted, thrilling softness of those speaking eyes! One picture at the Hermitage is like this! And,—then, over her delicate, proud face a smile broke faintly, as coldly bright as the glitter of the autumn sun on the snowy peak of the ghostly Jungfrau! It was her parting greeting—a silent adieu! Her lips moved! I flashed a single glance of caution! Her last look was to me a benison, a blessing, an appeal. The woman heart spoke through those shining depths to me of her gratitude, and—to Dimitri—of a love beyond the grave—deathless—eternal! The sturdy soldiers closed in; their officer saluting, as Trepoff, with one last look at me,—strode down the prison stairway, before that lovely lady. He was a knight battling in her defense! She was, alas, a "State Criminal," now! a "Martyr" soon to be! And—on the very edge of her open grave, for her life—he dared not speak. The last echoes



died away! The old Sergeant locked the door. I threw myself on the couch; and that gloomy cell echoed to a man's heart-broken sobs! Minutes dragged along to hours! I could not read;—I feared I should be mad! I tried to write!—useless! I vainly paced the cell like a caged tiger! The long, weary day wore on in agony. Would they take a recess? Would murder follow its poisoned trail slowly? Would the brutal effectiveness of the court be shown in a "quick dispatch" of this forejudged case? I strode up and down like a caged wolf! Alas! Helpless to aid her now! Ah! No! It was "Russian policy" to draw out these last hours. She might then perhaps break down in nerve! She would be jaded and wearied with details, so as to be weakened beyond resistance when questioned! The state took no risks—and—played with its victim! Mountains of papers would be written up—so that the Czar's ministers would have a cord of official documents, to refer to, if any murmur of sympathy should reach the ear of the manly and right-minded Czar. An appeal might touch the tender heart of the wistful, womanly, terror-haunted Czarina!

Far from the land which bore her, and the friends of her modest girlhood, that lovely Danish Princess bore for years her Imperial honors wearily, under the heavy pressure of the diamond tiara of the Romanoffs. It presses heavily with the great blood-red ruby, gleaming over the white brilliants! The heaviest crown in the wide—wide world! Blood is always on the snows of Russia! I noted not the lapse of time. My poor Hermione was being hunted down to death! Over on the angle of the bastion the blue and white ensign flapped like a vulture's wing on the cold air. I cursed my helplessness! And—Trepoff's sufferings—only doubled mine! The door opened! I sprang up as if shot! Ah! yes—the usual meal was provided! For, eating goes on in all scenes with passive necessity of recurrence. Bitter morsels are those eaten in solitude, handed to a prisoner by a tyrant's jailer. Where was Trepoff—braving a world in his awful repression now? I kept my calmness, as well as I could. I swore that I would not break down

before these exemplars of how low a stratum there can be in what we call "Humanity!" And, yet I was alone! Dimitri had to play his poor part, certainly! And, Serge tied down on a sick-bed!

Trepoff came, hastily, with anxious brow. He drew me to the end of the room.

"Recess for an hour! I have just received a letter from Mouravieff. You are pardoned,—to take effect on the conclusion of this matter! Then, you must leave Russia at once,—conducted to the frontier. Nothing new yet from the other side. A note was sent me by my man. They were then leaving the house to watch the governess on her way! She was taking a sleigh, alone, to come over here." He paused. "As a witness, too!"

"And, Hermione?" I quickly queried.

"The court assembled promptly. Some good men sit on it. The same judge advocate. They assigned one of our best military lawyers to her defense. She bears up well. He does all he can."

"The charges!" I cried, in anxiety.

"High treason,—conspiracy,—false impersonation,—having contraband documents;—four in all!" said he, bitterly. "Charges enough to hang twenty!"

"She pleaded?" I interrupted.

"Not guilty! She excepted to the jurisdiction, as not being a Russian subject;—'overruled'—was the reply of the President."

"Who has testified?" I continued.

"Luboff,—General Haxo's tool,—General Haxo himself,—the Dvornik,—the State—(by the Interior Office register)—and the two police agents who followed you from Zastrow's to the Winter Garden. That is all, this morning," he concluded the list. "But it's more than enough," he groaned.

"What did they prove?" I asked, with burning eagerness.

"Only the false impersonation;—nothing positive yet about those damnable papers," was his reply. "Of course, they will put anything in they choose!"

"And who remains for the afternoon?" I questioned.

"Mademoiselle Dauvray, and myself, the Captain

of the Guard, and the two Countesses Komaroff, who have volunteered through General Zastrow. They have Mouravieff's approval to testify as to the affairs at the opera:—and Hermione's general good conduct," replied Trepoff.

"God bless them! I suppose they have only done so to be able to see the poor woman face to face—and let her know their kindness will follow her to the foot of the scaffold," he continued.

"They are noble women," I rejoined. "Serge is getting a lovely little heroine for a wife! Vera is an angel! My testimony will be only as to the package being found where it was. That I can't deny," said Trepoff, with a groan.

I forced him to eat something. His cheeks burned in fever. His trembling hand shook as he lifted the glass of wine I forced on him.

"I am afraid I will betray myself," he murmured,—and then said: "I sent Serge home to my quarters to stay there, if we should find out anything!" said Trepoff, sadly. "He dragged out of bed to come—at great risk. I fear it is useless."

"Hope on to the last!" I cried. I did not yet despair! The recess time was now up. Hermione had not been reconducted. Her dinner was sent to her at the council room! And—the rank of the Komaroff ladies allowed them a chance to speak to her—a blessing of God, now! Trepoff was at the door. I felt a presentiment of some important news! My heart told me that there were angels toiling for the helpless one!

"Dimitri," I said, "send me word what testimony the governess gives! Has she arrived yet?" His face hardened.

"Just as I came to the keep, she drove up," said my friend. "I will get the Brigade Major to bring you over a note. I want to watch all and cheer Hermione with my presence! She is a dauntless woman—a born queen! The Adjutant knows you are pardoned, so there will be only a formal restraint now! Be cautious to the last!" He wrung my hand and disappeared.

A long hour wore away. I took up the wolf's pace

again around my casemate parlor! I was counting time on the watch, which lay open on the table! The sound of footsteps roused me. Was it Trepoff? No!—it was the genial Brigade Major! He entered and greeted me most courteously. Trepoff had told him of my pardon. He was disposed to be very indulgent, to what he considered a foolish escapade of an American tourist!

“You must not mind this—no Russian will blame you for standing by a woman!” The dawning friendship of the Mouravieffs, Komaroffs, and the connection with the Zastrows, was the “open sesame” to his regard. For, Serge and Trepoff were both beloved by all the militaires of note, and they all risked their lives—under the same banner! He told me the Countesses Komaroff were cheering the prisoner now. I asked him as to the trial,—its probable result. His face darkened at once! He shook his head gravely, handing me, carelessly, a note from Trepoff.

“It is against my duty to speak of the trial! We must see all here—in silence!” I opened the note quietly and sprang to my feet, and cried out:

“Glory to God!” The blasé Brigade Major gazed at me in a curious wonder. All Americans were strange fish to him!—and, in popular Russian estimation, were more or less crazy! I caught my breath and then controlled my joy;—for I had a secret now—a joyous one! It took my breath away! The note was a harbinger of hope! I pored over its words:

“Found the right man! I am going to meet Serge! News later. The smith lives half-way out to Aboukhoff. —will surely communicate to-night! The French devil has just perjured herself, foully. She is a fiend;—don’t detain the Brigade Major;—he will watch over Hermione’s case while I am away. I want to get back to hear her own testimony. Hope on! Destroy this!

“Trepoff.”

“Where is the Major gone to?” I asked with an apparent carelessness.

“He was summoned to the city and then went off like

a shot. I must go back now. By the way, Grahame,—you have had a hard time! I want you to breakfast at the “mess” before you leave us! Of course, we must wait for your official papers,” he added with a smile. “You must not think hardly of Russia.” I scarcely heard him, but I bowed my thanks. Gallant fellow!

“Has the governess finished her testimony?” said I, as the Major reached the door.

“Partly,” he said, with some hesitation. “She will be cross-examined, after a little, and I hope that her testimony will be broken. It bears hard on that poor woman, I fear,” said the Major, with a sigh, as he nodded, and then walked away.

The blood surged like flame through my veins. Great God! Had they really found the right man? I prayed in my heart for one gleam of sunshine in all this gloom! Was it too late to expose Haxo’s wiles? I feared so. I lay down to rest. I needed it. The dark afternoon settled to a still darker evening. Heavy flakes of snow fell outside. I could not see the parade ground. The man now lit up the lights. I resigned myself to the maddening excitement of waiting for the news from Dimitri. Would he never return! I measured the cell a hundred times in vain. In an hour and a half, I heard the tramp of the guard, bringing Hermione back to her cell. I did not dare to make any demonstration. I could not trust myself now. The old Sergeant was watching me. I feared to complicate the jailer, and then lose my only friend. My heart went out in silent prayer to her. If ever a prayer pierced the steel and stone of a gloomy prison, it was mine for her safety,—for some adequate punishment for her recklessness, instead of the nameless “horrors of the condemned cell!” Her one fatal quest, the forfeit of a life! Supper came, and my old Sergeant was now watching with cunning, glittering eyes! He was still “rouble hunting.” I did not need him yet! Time enough yet to apply the remedy for him. When he could earn his cure! As the jailer put down the tray, I saw a bit of paper crumpled in his hand. I walked toward the door, as he shut it, and then soon was possessed of it. I devoured

it eagerly. It might be the last note to me! The Queen of Forget-me-nots wrote:

"I am lost! The governess has sworn to every possible falsehood. Trepoff is noble. He swore only to the finding of the packet. The Komaroff ladies were angels of kindness. Their dear eyes cheered me! I fear the very worst! I have poison, but I will wait to the last moment. I am to be examined to-morrow—and, the forged papers will be then produced. Anything from Trepoff? Quand même. I am willing to see it closed up—this fitful fever!"  
Hermione."

Yes! it was "quand même." "Even to the last!" Poor defenseless woman! I did not dare let her know of the new hopes;—but if a discovery came I would notify her if I used every rouble in my pocket. And where were Dimitri—and Serge?—the friends who should now work! It was now six o'clock. Taps were at nine. Would Serge succeed? I beat my brains in vain! That poison! How did Hermione get it? The merciful "sister of the order" had given it to her, undoubtedly. The "Central Section" of twenty-five trusted "ones" had the gloomy duty in Petersburg of furnishing the doomed with the means of cheating the rack or dishonor and preventing final disclosures. So far Durand had trusted me. That rash attempted suicide at the Zastrows would tell against her with her remorseless judges! Why should an innocent woman kill herself? Simply to escape the lingering horrors of a Russian prison pen! Numbers had done so! I fear numbers will do so yet! And, other prisons of the world are worse than the military dungeons of Russia! I waited while the weary hours slowly passed. Sentinels and the clanging guard clanged to and fro. No news—no news! It was very near taps,—when a Sergeant and three men came to the door.

"The prisoner Grahame was to be taken at once to the Adjutant's office to see the Brigade Major," the old Sergeant interpreted. I was excited. Would I be cut off from Hermione? I threw on my coat and took my hat. Was there any new complication in my case? Had Haxo

taken some sly step to involve and detain me? I resolved all this as I walked, in a heavy snowstorm, over the parade ground. I appreciated the delicacy of being a lonely "American Sovereign" far away from the land of Equality! I sighed for its meanest alley now! Ushered in by the guard, I found the Brigade Major at his desk. He lost no time in performing his "pleasing duty."

"I sent for you," said he, "to notify you that you have been pardoned and will be discharged in three days. I congratulate you!" said the Major, warmly, as he shook my hand. As he did so, he blushed. I felt a letter in it. The Adjutant dismissed me with a nod. He was a gallant friend—"under the rose"—and—a good fellow, too!

"Return the prisoner!—quickly, before taps! The gates are now closing," said the officer, sharply;—and so I marched away in military double time! I hurried to the quick step of the guards, through the darkness of the night. Did I hold gladness or misery—victory or defeat—in my hand? The neat little surprises of life in an official boarding-house! I still hoped for good news, but I hardly dared to, now! All had been so unfortunate, till the very moment. Every "smart" plan had failed! I thought of the useless Wilna visit—of the Warsaw departure so skillfully planned,—all to no purpose,—of Captain Serge Zastrow's reckless exposure of us all, in a lame subterfuge! I was soon in my room. The guards left me. Loud bugles were already sounding out the first call for taps! My old Sergeant saluted and quickly disappeared to his vodka. The jailer shut my heavy door with a clang and locked it for the night! One inch of candle only! That was enough! I tore open the envelope. It was Dimitri's bulletin of triumph. Hurrah!

"Have got the right man and the key used. He unlocked the box for the French woman while we were all at the opera. She was found dead, in an abandoned sleigh, near the bridge-head, on her way homeward, this evening! Executed! Strangled! Serge and I go to examine her baggage secretly. Every hope now! All depends on our joint secrecy;—will not approach the Emperor till Hermione's trial is over. The police will

investigate Mdlle. Dauvray's death. I think I have trapped Haxo! Silence! discretion! Not even a hint to the Adjutant! I will see you early. Hermione may be saved yet.

"Trepoff."

I then threw myself, dressed as I was, on the couch; yet I slept in the dark prison like a happy child on its mother's bosom. For, I was free at last, and—I saw the way out—of darkest Russia. But—Hermione! The star of hope shone through the stone walls of my dungeon at last. She might be saved from death—but—at what a fearful price—a prisoner, perhaps, for years! And—helpless there! Morning without daylight, again! It was only an "official morning;" for the "gun fire" so proclaimed it,—for it was dark as night. I woke, and soon my Sergeant-valet reported. He was now very obsequious. The news of my pardon had been spread by the guard: and the jailer knew it. Candles were lit,—warm tea soon steadied my nerves. They were all hunting for my roubles now! It all seemed like a dream. I waited anxiously for the arrival of Dimitri. It was yet dark. I knew I would have to await some glimmer of daylight before he could come! and, how would the new discovery be availed of? The governess dead! And,—who had slain her? I remembered Durand's cross in the air! Nothing but an overmastering passion or a day of battle could rouse this luxurious officer at such an unearthly hour. His note had been destroyed. Should I warn Hermione of the good news? No!—not until a positive confirmation of them! That would be a desperate responsibility: if anything intervened. I held my soul back in patience and waited. For, her lover alone should tell these tidings to her! It was hardly eight o'clock when Trepoff appeared. Rosy and freshly-shaven, he looked like an eager bridegroom, rather than a soldier on duty. I was finishing my breakfast. I lost no time. Lighting a cigar, we walked to the other end of the room. I did not fear to involve him now, by my open friendship. His sparkling eyes told me all the story! Seating himself on



the window-ledge, with his cigarette in full blast, he began. I lit my cigar.

"When I went down to the court, it had just assembled. I exchanged greetings silently with Hermione, as the governess was sworn. Her demeanor was admirable. She gave her name, profession and residence. Evidently she was coached up not to show any open feeling. The length of time it took her to arrive, had given her a chance to see Haxo himself, or to get her final orders at second-hand. The Judge Advocate skillfully drew out of her all the general facts. He then handed her the bundle of papers. The court rose 'en masse'!

"Do you recognize this package?" he asked.

"I do," said she. Hermione's eyes were riveted steadily on her now!

"Where did you see it last?"—from the Judge Advocate.

"At General Michael Zastrow's house, when it was sealed up by Major Trepoff and another officer," she replied. She was careful, and artful!

"Please examine it and see if it is unbroken," was the next remark.

"It is in the condition it was when it was shown to me!" was her answer.

"Very good," said the Judge Advocate. "You are excused for a few moments." I was then called with the Captain of the Guard. We were both sworn. We were asked to identify the package and did so, as being sealed and intact. The Captain was excused.

"While you are on the stand, Major Trepoff, will you break the seals and identify the documents," said the prosecutor. And, there, before my darling, I had to obey!" he groaned. "I did so, and verified their correctness,—from a list I was ordered to keep. I was forced to admit all the facts of their finding. The prosecution then rested, as regarded me.

"I caught the eye of Hermione's counsel. He proceeded to cross-examine me, gently. They all seemed careful not to worry me!" mused Dimitri.

"Please examine the documents very carefully, and see that they are the same which you marked!" said he.

I did so, and as I looked at them I noticed a date on several of the printed ones. It was three years back! My eyes sparkled. The counsel of my love understood me! I had a clue! I decided to get that on the record—for Palace use.

“‘Do you see anything strange in them?’ said he, gently feeling his way.

“‘Only the dates on these printed papers are over three years old!’ I remarked. This discovery made a general sensation! The French woman started. She then settled down to quietly examining Hermione from a distance.

“‘That is all,’ was the remark. I took my list and put it carefully away. The Captain was then examined, with the same result! He was not cross-examined,—we all agreed as to the main facts. He left the court. I was recalled for one more question.

“‘Did you see anything suspicious in the behavior of the accused while in your cousin’s house as a guest?’

“‘Nothing at all!’ I replied. I was finally excused and Mademoiselle Dauvray recalled! I knew that she had been permitted to hear our testimony to guide her up to build her story as strong as possible!

“‘Now, Mademoiselle Dauvray, please to examine all these documents carefully,’ said the silken-voiced prosecutor. The sleek spy pondered well over them. She did the work with care, and compared them with a list of her own!

“‘They are the documents taken from Madame’s jewel box in my presence, by Major Trepoff and the Captain, when the room was searched. Here is the wrapper they were in when found.’ This was a volunteer.

“‘Do you know what they are?’ said the Judge Advocate.

“‘Yes! They are nihilist documents and lists,’ said she, calmly, ‘with a plan of conspiracy to kill his Majesty the Emperor!’

“I started now in surprise! She had told us all officially she did not read or write Russian! Either she had lied, or some one had told her what they were! And General Zastrow swears she could not read or write Russian! I

met the eye of Hermione's counsel. We were trapped. I could not be recalled now, save with the consent of the prosecution. That was now impossible, I knew; for General Haxo, who sat by as an official, 'hors de loi,' smiled as he saw me. He saw that his inspired work was being well done. Steadily and coolly the noose was being tied!

"Did you ever see these papers before the case was opened?" said the Judge Advocate, hurrying along on his beaten path.

"Hermione lifted her beautiful eyes to the cold face of the witness.

"Yes," said she. Then, in a clear voice, which made my heart freeze: 'I saw Madame put them in the box the night she returned from the opera.' It was a fiendish, deliberate lie,—this giving a sister woman over to the cord and rack! Every head was lifted in the court! At last, Hermione was about to speak! Her counsel caught her arm.

"How did you see this?" immediately asked the prosecutor.

"I was passing the door as Madame returned, and I saw her slip a packet like this, from her bosom into the jewel box, as I went by!" was the jezebel's answer! I tried to catch her eye,—impossible. Even the prejudiced officers saw the weakness of this. He questioned, and tried to give her a chance to build up her yarn.

"How did you come to be able to see this?"

"Ah! Madame was so beautifully dressed that I could not resist one look, as the door was partly open!—I admire the lovely dresses so," said the female spy, with a faint sneer.

"Did she see you?" continued the prosecutor,—now very, very bland.

"No!" was the reply: 'I think she did not.'—and, Hermione's eyes were blazing like flashing diamonds.

"And so, this fiend continued to load every lie possible on Hermione, until even the Court felt some decided animus was urging her on.

"That will do," said the Judge Advocate, at last, triumphantly. The woman stepped away to sit down. Her-

mione looked like a marble statue, trembling to its fall. The shock to her was great! For, she seemed abandoned of God and man!

“‘One moment,’ said her counsel, and he was proceeding to cross-examine the governess, when my man sent in word by the orderly to me, ‘Please, come out instantly.’ I retired, with a cheering glance at the impassive Hermione, who now looked resigned. I sent for the Brigade Major, and then asked him to see you. I told him to then watch over our poor darling, as well as the two Princesses Komaroff. I sped out for the news,—with little hope—but I was overjoyed, for Serge had written me the news I sent you about the locksmith being found! He added, then, ‘Come to me instantly at your rooms. Leave all!’ I jumped in my sleigh and dashed away. The sleigh-ride to my rooms was the quickest I ever made. Serge had Durand waiting there with her news. The French governess had gone into one of the police stations, and staid fifteen minutes; from there, she drove rapidly up the river bank to where the manufactories and small shops begin, alone, where you met Serge on your return from Wilna! And, like wolves,—they followed her! When she went at last, into one of the working locksmiths’ shops,—our man stopped the sleigh! He had shaved his beard off and muffled up his face. It was a very dark day yesterday, you know! While pricing some cheap cutlery,—he watched that fiend, who talked with one of the master workmen. She finally handed him something in a package and some money. Here was the man we sought! But how to get him? She then went out, wrapped herself up, and drove toward the fortress. It was the belief of the two people that she was leaving her own false key for safety with the man, and paying him liberally. He had evidently called on the governess for money, perhaps, having heard of Hermione’s arrest. Very likely she got her money from the police to pay him! Our man on watch went to the shop door and then made his signal! The woman left her sleigh to wait, at a wine-shop near; the driver, too, knew his business well. He, going into the shop, told the man where it was. Then, with a descrip-

tion of the smith, she took another sleigh, near, and reported to Serge, who sent for me!" I was breathless with a growing excitement.

Trepoff took a glass of wine, and said: "I will be brief. I sent my man at once to bring the workman to my rooms on some pretended work of the most immediate necessity. By the time my valet got there, our spy had the locksmith in a very good humor! They had visited the vodki shop a dozen times, as he had given him some little alterations of an immediate nature, on a bit of fancy goods he bought! A few roubles, and a drink started the locksmith away off happy, to me! Serge and I were now all ready! The woman, too, was at hand. I had a couple of my old soldiers who are devoted to me, also, in the house. I could not believe it possible that I would catch the man so easily.

"Soon my valet drove up,—the smith was with him! I had just broken the lock of my English gun-case so as to have a ready excuse. I at once proceeded to my business! In my table drawer, I put a good hunting knife within reach. My trusty valet watched the door,—and, —I had drawn the curtains for my tableau! The smith was half tipsy. 'I must take this off and take it home to fix it,' he blundered out. 'These English locks are hard to repair. It will take some time, Barin! A bad break!' I knew it very well!

"'Can't you fix it like you did the lock the other day at the Admiralty Quai house?' I said, impatiently.

"'Where?' said he.

"'At my cousin Zastrow's!'

"'Oh! yes! I can,—but I had to make that key at home. I took the impression of the lock the day before. It was a very hard job. The lady gave me a royal price—twenty-five roubles! So, I worked all day to make the key. I had to fit it to the lock afterwards at the room! The French lady did not want to break the lock! Her mistress must not know she had lost the key,—so, she said!'

"So, that she devil was smart enough to lie to him. I was now half wild with excitement!"—and, then, Trep-

off grimly smiled. "Serge was sitting by quietly smoking, and hearing all. I said:

"'Have you seen her since?' He gave me a leer of natural cunning. He was startled, and yet he wanted 'more roubles.' He thought that he scented an intrigue, or a valuable secret.

"That was enough! He was lying, too! I caught him by the throat and choked him like a dog, holding the bare knife to his heart.

"'Give me the key she left with you to-day, or, by God! I'll run you through!' said I, as I pricked him with the sharp point;—and how he howled! He whitened to ashes, and fell on his knees and bawled like a calf!—one of the boors!

"'Oh, Barin! for God's sake, put that knife down! I'll give up the key to you,' he bellowed. 'I have it! She told me to keep it with me, for fear——'

"I gave the drunken scoundrel a shake, and then threw the knife on the table. I rang for my man and sent him out for my own notary! One of my old soldiers kept an eye on the frightened fool, who gave up his key

"In half an hour, we had his deposition, which Boris countersigned as eye witness. I took the real key of the box and the notary sealed the two together. I sent the notary away. I have got this fellow now in my house under guard,—to produce him, when wanted." Trepoff's eyes gleamed as he continued: "Now, by this time, it was four o'clock. Serge was helped into the sleigh with me. We drove down to General Zastrow's to confer with him.

"When we got there, several secret agents and an officer were waiting in the hall. I pushed my way in, suspecting some new trouble! Serge and I were taken in the small salon by the old General, who was broken down.

"'I thank God you are here,' he said. Poor old Michael!

"'What is the matter?' we both cried. We were in the dark. He said:

"Mademoiselle Dauvray has just been found dead on the bridge seated in the abandoned sleigh, No. 371, which

brought her back from the court martial this afternoon. The driver, too, is missing!"—and the old General quite broke down!

"‘Another vile scandal!’ we both cried out. ‘Impossible!—Mademoiselle Dauvray dead!’

"‘It is only too true!’ said Zastrow. ‘She had crossed on the boat-bridge, on the way home; she was found strangled, with a heavy double cord slip-noose, which was deeply buried in her neck! She was frozen stiff when found, and had probably been dead an hour. The sleigh had been abandoned in a dark alley, only a few blocks from the bridge-head. The horse was standing there alone, in the snow!’

"‘How did you hear this?’

"‘The mounted Cossack patrol saw the sleigh go on the bridge, with the driver, and one man sitting beside the lady. They then turned into the alley. He thought the two men had only got out for a drink, at a café near by, and the woman was holding the horse! They did not seem to return. The woman in the sleigh never moved! It alarmed the patrol. He rode up and spoke to her. She did not answer! He sprang off his horse, and found that the silent woman was seated there stone dead. Her furs had been turned up around her neck to hide her face! She was already cold,’ said the wearied General, whose house was one of horror now, as well as suspicion! ‘I can not have her—her remains brought here to my home!’ He had a horror of murders and all these startling novelties.

"‘What did the Cossack do?’ we both asked in a breath. I was stunned at this vengeance,—so swiftly striking her down! And, I saw again that shadowy cross in the air.

"‘Why, he instantly called the relief, and sent for a police inspector,—a man whom I know well, who drove down at once. The guard kept the curious crowd away! The sleigh was then driven to the nearest ward station!’

"‘Who did this?’ was asked, eagerly.

"‘The nihilists,’ said General Zastrow, solemnly. ‘Some of that hidden under-world!’

"‘How do you know that?’ was our query.

"He quietly opened his pocketbook and then handed

me a little paper. I seized it," continued Trepoff. "It read, in good, round Russian:

<p>'Josephine de l'Orme. Police Spy. 'Executed for her crimes. 'Ask for Mlle. Dauvray—at 'General Michael Zastrow's.'</p>
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"The General continued: 'This inspector had often seen my governess. He then opened the woman's cloak and found this paper pinned to her breast. He quietly removed it and has made no report of this yet. Nothing whatever was taken from her person! He has all her papers and valuables himself. He will make no official return till to-morrow, when he turns all in!'"

"It is a strange vengeance!" I murmured,—as Trepoff continued his story:

"Poor General Zastrow broke down then,—entirely overcome by all this new trouble! 'This has surely some connection with the trial!' said he, anxiously."

"How will it affect her?" I asked.

He shook his head in doubt. "Now, Grahame," said Trepoff, "I must get at once over to the court! I'll finish my story briefly. I asked Zastrow to leave me there with Serge a minute. He did not as yet know of my suspicions! But, Serge and I exchanged glances. 'I am going at once to the Inspector,' said I. 'You have now a woman's life in your hands! Get up stairs with some trusty help, and have all this dead witch's trunks and boxes instantly carried into your room! Hide them! Leave all her loose clothes and small things just as they are; get Vera to help you! Don't let her tell the old General!' He saw the idea. 'I want every paper in her rooms! Conceal those yourself!'"

"Where are you going?" said Serge to me, as I warned him to make a list of them all and have Vera mark them, too.

"I am going to fight the devil now with fire! I am going to bring that locksmith here and open all the



witch's trunks!—also, I will see what papers she had hidden on her person! This Inspector is my sworn friend, luckily!"

"I got away to my rooms, sent the locksmith with his tools to be taken by my own valet into Serge's room, by the back way. I also sent that sewing woman, who is as smart as a steel trap, back. I told her what had happened."

"What did she say, Major?" I broke in here. I knew now that Durand's was the hand which doomed the French traitress!

"‘Oh,’ she said, quietly; ‘some one has been evidently watching for her and caught her on the lonely way back in the dark, and then killed her on the bridge, so as to throw the blame on the ordinary criminal classes! There are frequent crimes on that bridge!’"

"I asked the woman, Walter, why she thought they did not throw her body overboard. She mused a moment. ‘They may have wished her fate to be known; or else I suppose they were seen driving on the bridge and were afraid the governess might be missed at the other end, so they abandoned her in the alley!’ I agreed in this view.

"I then left Zastrow's and drove to the ward station. I know that Inspector well, as an old, very old, friend! I told him I wanted to see the papers and articles, as she had some of cousin Zastrow's keys, for they had had their women search the body already. He gave me the whole bunch of keys.

"‘Don't let any one see you here, and get done quickly,’ said he. I sat down and examined the papers! In her purse was this little strip of paper! (and he exultantly showed me a small piece). Here it is!" said the Major. "Read it."

My hand trembled. It was as follows. A legacy of my dead enemy, now powerless:

"Report for orders early to-mor- row morning. H."
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"That was all. I recognized General Haxo's own writing at once, as I handle all the secret papers at the Ministry. I slipped this in my pocket. I called the Inspector in. The rest were only the usual pocket articles of a lady. I said to him:

"Look here,—I can't tell these different keys apart. Can't I take the whole lot? I will send them back by private messenger when we get ours!"

"Yes," said he; "I'll seal them all together, and you can give me a receipt for the number. You can tie a tag on each one belonging to Madame Zastrow. To-morrow I'll give you all hers to keep in trust,—on an order from the Judge!"

"I joyously hastened away! I hurried to the house and went up to Boris' room. We at once opened all her trunks with her keys and took out every single paper! The trunks were then carried back unseen,—while Serge and Vera quickly sorted the papers!"

"Madame Komaroff returned, then, from her outing, and my aunt entertained her. I drew General Zastrow aside. I told him he had kept a deadly, murderous spy in his house, for years, who had evidently secretly reported on all his affairs, and now had trapped poor Hermione! Zastrow was half-crazed! I made him then sit down with Serge and myself, and number and initial every paper of the whole lot! The valet, the locksmith, and the woman saw them all taken from her trunks! We then sent the servant out, and have agreed after a long talk, as follows:

"We have Haxo now clearly involved! We will keep quiet about this till the whole trial is over! Haxo could not hear of the death,—until the court closed! He must have waited while the two agents gave their testimony,—and also the Countesses Komaroff,—who made a great impression, as they were not bullied. Their rank is too high! The Adjutant told me that Hermione rose and bowed her thanks as the two ladies left. They greeted her kindly, though in silence,—and then left the hall!"

"General Haxo drove leisurely home. He did not get the report of the murder till too late to keep the affair smothered! The news is all over the town now! Zas-

throw, Serge and I went up to the station, and then legally identified the dead woman! She was evidently not robbed!—but, had been simply strangled like a dog; for the cord nearly met in her neck! It was firmly knotted also under the swelling! Any outcry was thus rendered impossible! The man in the sleigh must have held her up till she was dead, and then fled away with his accomplice! Now, General Michael will watch the Emperor and ask an instant audience. I will handle Haxo. I shall surely tell Count Tolstoi all,—and do it this very night! Serge will inform Count Mouravieff and those Komaroff angels!” said the weary Trepoff. “We will see the Emperor and Empress both. We will now let General Haxo play out his whole hand, and then quietly checkmate him! I will watch over Hermione night and day! God bless her!” He rose. It was only half an hour now till the court would again assemble! Hermione was soon to be taken over, for her last terrible ordeal on the stand.

“Trepoff,” said I, “you are a noble fellow. Now, for God’s sake, can’t you in some way ease our dear sufferer’s mind about this day’s fearful work? She will be tired out,—trapped,—and, perhaps, wait in agony all night! I am afraid that she will kill herself;—she can do it! She has the means!” I solemnly said. He started. I told this deliberately to goad him into action! I did not even now wish to let him know how I was communicating with her! It was my own little triumph!

“What can I do?” he said. He was excited with the recital. I said:

“You have the right to enter her cell on the order from Tolstoi. Go in, when the guard comes for her. Tell her there all that is prudent! If you had gone in there before, you might have been reported by the guard! Haxo will not make a handle of it now;—he dare not! Speak rapidly to her,—in English! The guard will not be able to understand a single word! Tell her that I’ll watch over her every instant. Don’t raise her hopes, except to assure her you will finally save her life. She might otherwise lay hands on herself! Be sure to let

her know that French devil is dead! They might startle her with that!"

"I'll do this at once! Good-bye! Think all over and advise me. I will be back at recess," replied the impatient Major.

The guard was tramping up the stair. He went out and placed himself at their head. The officer naturally supposed him to be on special duty! He did not want to show his Tolstoi order until forced to do so, to head off General Haxo's schemes! The trial over, the chief would try and attack her personally some way! We feared all possible treachery now. For we knew the past! I heard the musical voice once more, speaking quickly to Trepoff, as they passed my door. Blessed fortune! Her mind was eased with knowing her friends had not left her to perish in helpless sorrow!—and the star of hope faintly gleamed again. An hour passed away. Seated at the embrasured window, gazing out on the dark Neva, for it was again a gloomy day,—I wondered at the changing destinies of poor Mortality!—of the poor, little games we all busy ourselves with here below! The deep, designing adventuress, governess, spy and traitress had run her dark race to the end! So, it was both revenge, money and protection in her case! The hidden power of the police, Haxo's personal protection,—and all her skillful womanly wiles were all unavailing! She was lying there dead;—killed in her very hour of triumph,—and had recrossed that "bridge of sighs" as a corpse!—strangled like a wild animal,—without a single word of pity. I wondered what was hissed in her dying ear, as the fatal noose was jerked home! What other horrible treasons rose to her startled conscience as the grip tightened? The beautiful, betrayed and hunted Hermione, her victim, still lived,—and her would-be destroyer was cold in death! Fortune's rolling wheel! For, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,—I will repay!" What would be the effect of this? We could not be connected with the death in any way;—all our hands were tied. All the family, too, were far above any suspicion. General Zastrow was at home; Serge, at Trepoff's rooms; and the latter in his own house! Hermione and I were in prison, and

even the two friendly spies were not on the streets! Some old enmity would be sought for as a reason! Some hidden slaughter by her lying tongue in past times. For—all Russia hates the police spy. What would a thorough examination of her papers prove? While these matters filled my mind, the minutes lengthened along into hours!

But one tie bound me now to Russia! When released and I had assisted to do all that my ability and experience would allow me for Hermione de Vries, I would take Madeleine and leave Russia, never to return! They had made the pace a little too rapid for me;—I was tired of my sensational rôles. The business matters were now so skeletonized, that I could direct and advise all easily from a distance! Justine Zastrow could come on to Berlin or Vienna,—as she chose,—and we could commune there in peace! I would myself keep out of the Bear's den! Trepoff returned to me at half-past twelve. He was calm and hopeful.

"I have just heard from the house," said he, as he gave me a cheering letter from my sister. "The General called personally this morning and had a very guarded interview with General Zastrow, who was very watchful and said proportionately little! He had ordered the rooms used by the dead woman to be sealed and await the authorities! Zastrow was formally notified to appear to-morrow at the investigation of her death!

"The news has been at once suppressed, for fear of exciting the nihilists to future successful crimes! The written report of the Inspector will be read to-morrow. The driver of public vehicle No. 371 has disappeared, and has either been murdered, or else was connected in some way with the crime! He seemed to be an honest enough, drunken, good-natured fellow, in his way. That man's fate is a mystery. He can't get very far away without papers! His name and description, too, are known, from his driving license. He had his 'card,' like all 'Isvostichiks.' The locksmith knows now, too, that she is dead! He will probably freely confess all! His employer is a most respectable man, and will also testify to her visits! Serge is at the house now, and directing all there. The old veteran is completely unmanned. Your Madeleine is

frightened again until she is half wild. All this is kept from your sister Justine, as far as it bears on our case. They will have a strange opinion of our associates."

"The trial, to-day?" I asked.

"I saw Hermione and cheered her up with these new hopes!"—his eyes brightened as he said this. "She was questioned at some length," he replied. "She declined to give the Court her history and nationality, but she stated on oath she was not a Russian subject! She frankly admitted coming over the frontier irregularly! She said her innocently assuming the rôle of your sister was forced upon her! She also positively declared her entire ignorance of the fatal papers! Following my advice, she said she could not tell how they came there! She repeated her own original decision to leave the land peaceably! No other objects would she admit. When questioned as to any part in conspiracy, she said that she had no associates and was engaged in no scheme! As for the testimony of the Dauvray woman, she contradicted it, saying it was absolutely impossible to be true! When asked if she had ever met the governess before abroad,—she answered simply, 'No!' There was no break in Hermione's clear, straight story! After some tedious efforts to trap her, she was then questioned on her attempted suicide. She explained this on the ground of sudden excitement, and her desire to die rather than be arrested! 'I feared a Russian prison, from all I had heard of its severity,' she calmly answered. When questioned as to the reason of her fears, she said that she was now afraid her life was sought by some powerful enemy: as her escort had been forced into a quarrel to the death, by an unknown officer, at the opera! This answer made a great sensation! She was warned as to her refusals to answer any of the questions as being a grave cause of doubt,—and a new offense. 'Contumacy!' roared old Obranovitch. When asked further why she came to Russia, her reply was, 'It is impossible for me to tell!' The reasons were simply personal and private,—every woman has her own social life!—and more she would not say. The recess time approaching, the Court then took time to deliberate over her last refusals. She is still there,

in the ante-rooms,—her woman with her. The Brigade Major is watching every movement."

Trepoff was now exhausted, and rested himself on my couch till he had to leave for the Court, taking a slight lunch only. "It is an agony of hell to play my double part!" he groaned. I was also tired and wearied out, with all these different emotions. The most fatal admission of Hermione's whole behavior was the attempt to take the poison, rather than be dragged to prison. How could we reasonably explain that to the Czar or Czarina? Only by referring to the attempts to hound us all down, and as the result of fear! And we must prove the hounding down! It was a long afternoon, this second fatal trial day. When the deepening shadows made the outer world a gloomy darkness, I heard the guard returning my "fair unknown" to her cell. Was it over now? I did not dare to speak as the exhausted Trepoff came in, dejected and hopeless! "It is all over now!" said the indefatigable officer. "The addresses are all done. The Court will sit to-night, and then deliberate by candle-light. To-morrow at ten, the verdict will be publicly announced! She is certainly doomed to this conviction, but her life shall be—must be—saved! I cheered her with my eyes," said he; "and she is calm and resigned! I wonder at her self-sustained courage! Mine is gone!" he sighed. "I must go back now and examine every paper of the dead witch! General Zastrow has publicly offered to defray her funeral expense. He wishes to have his house quiet. Frankly, Grahame, he waits only to see your family depart! It has been a very unlucky visit!" Trepoff only stated a well known fact. "I cannot blame him, Major; I would feel the same sentiments myself," was my reply. "But, cheer up! You must checkmate this Haxo now. By the way, watch him to-morrow. He will surely try and see Hermione alone, after the verdict! He will then endeavor to bully or delude her into a confession! You know his power." "I will do that!" said Dimitri. "Then we will all open our batteries! He does not know how strong a chain I have to tie his cruel hands! For, I think, he is 'boxed up' now! That sewing woman Durand wanted to come over and

see you, as she knows you are pardoned. I will get her a pass, and then send her over to-morrow. She is smart and faithful, and may be of further use to us! I keep away from her, only for the safety of all." I thanked the energetic Trepoff, who disappeared, to go over and confer with the family. As I would be discharged in one day more, I decided not to write Justine, but first explain myself to my sister Madeleine, and then get out of Russia at once. I could not tell my suffering one the whole story till Hermione's fate was finally decided! And, dare I tell her then? I was undecided yet! I passed a calmer night. My mind was resuming its balance. I felt relieved to know the French woman permanently removed. She had her just deserts. I felt sure General Haxo could not push Trepoff, Zastrow, Serge, the Komaroffs, and the great Count to the wall! These four working on the good Emperor, and the ladies acting also to interest the noble Czarina, would save the life of the imprudent Hermione! We had the stronger battalions now. If we could only use them! Would Haxo dare to put Hermione out of the way? He might! To save himself, and — her fatal threat of suicide would shield him. I dared not alarm Trepoff. I decided, however, that the time had come to expend some of the crisp hundred rouble notes hidden in my garments. I would get a little good out of some of my useless money! I would bribe the turnkey to report to me everything occurring in Hermione's cell! I would keep Durand with me to interpret to the jailer; and I could make a great hue and cry later. They all knew that. How to get rid of the old sergeant? A fifty-rouble note would stop his tongue, at all events; for he would not betray his Amerikansky barin! So, my plans all made, I awaited the arrival of Durand; for the reveillé cannon had ushered in "my last day" at the fortress as a prisoner—and the day of Hermione's doom! Breakfast was no sooner served than a sergeant of the guard ushered in Madame Durand, who had a pass from the Ministry of the Interior to see me alone. I was regarded as a boarder who had "given notice" of a change of hotels. Happy man! I



told the old sergeant, who was already on duty, to leave me for a time. I hinted that I would remember his services, as I would be relieved at sundown. He grinned and departed. More roubles in the air! The faithful woman was now full of tidings! I told her of my ability to send letters in to Hermione. Her eyes then sparkled. I called the jailer by knocking gently on my inside door. When he entered, I then walked to the other end of the room. I had been warned! Durand and the man exchanged a few words. They were the highest brief countersigns of their mysterious order. Durand said to me, as she came to my corner, "Write Madame now a few words! I want to send her in some letters now!" My pencil flew along. I briefly told "my prisoner" that the woman would remain till she wished otherwise. I wrapped a bank note around Durand's letters. Not a moment must be lost! Any interruption was possible there! And all traces must be destroyed! The jailer quickly disappeared and soon returned. I hastily told my Nihilist helper how deeply Major Trepoff was attached to Hermione, but that he was not even yet aware of her real character or that of herself. I described my own fears that General Haxo would visit Hermione after the verdict and before her sentence. "You know the limits of foul play—of his villainy!" I warned her. "Alas! only too well! And we must baffle him! He must yet think he is safe! But he must not see me," cried Durand. "It would ruin you!" What should we do! If enraged, or startled, he may change his plan! A summary execution would be his vengeance! The jailer returned with a scrap for Durand, covered with strange characters and mixed figures of a quaint order. A few words to me, also, proved her gratitude.

"Thanks! Keep Trepoff watching over me. Let Durand wait near me as long as she can—to the last moment, the very last! Don't fail in this. Hermione."

"Now," said I to the seamstress, "tell me of the household!" She reported the status. All was quiet. "Madeleine" was better; that was all she knew. The Major

himself now sent in word he would be early on the field, as the verdict would be rendered at ten. This was the turning point. "What was the secret of the vile French woman's death?" I eagerly demanded, as I gazed at the woman who knew. The brave Durand calmly told the whole story. "You should know! She was your foe as well as ours! It was splendidly done. The Central Section decided to execute her at the very moment necessary to prevent further damage to the interests of Madame Hermione! I was at the secret meeting. We did not wish to kill her before we had exhausted every chance of tracing the placing of those documents in the jewel box! But, her lying evidence was reported at once. The sleigh she took to the fortress was then followed. She had taken a common *isvotschik*, so as to prevent any suspicion, on her visit to the locksmith. He is really a cunning rogue, and he demanded more money of her. She left him the key, so as to have it safe in her absence, and also to quiet him. She paid him some little hush money, and promised more. While she was being cross-examined, our nearest people had a full report of the foul, lying testimony she gave! A sleigh was dispatched to our agents to act at once. I gave the word myself!" she proudly said, as I started. "They had already engaged the poor, stupid driver in a bout of friendly drinking, 'always in order,' and soon had him snugly sleeping in one of the low vodka shops in that deserted quarter around the fortress. They had disposed of him very skillfully! Decent people are afraid to live over there, and he could easily be lost there a week. When he was jolly enough, they had bought his horse and sleigh for a good cash sum. He had already freely indulged, for the sly 'de l'Orme' did not want any one to trace her path by him, and had told him to wait outside the fort. She paid royally! He was hungry and tired of waiting for her. She had paid in advance. When she came out, she looked only for the right sleigh. It was already quite dark, but the number 371 on the lanterns was enough. It was so dark that she could not see the driver's face. She wrapped the furs around her, and off they started, with a new driver. She gave the home direction. Her

work was done. One of our best men was stationed half-way across the bridge. He knew the number of the sleigh. We had also another hidden at the bridge head. He was to act later in another way, in case anything should have prevented the deed in 'crossing over the bridge!' Oh! we made sure!" she smiled. "This man had orders to stab her, if necessary, and escape then on the line of wood boats which always lie by hundreds moored along the bank. Throwing his knife in the river, he could never be caught among the boatmen; for they all sympathize with the pursued! It was unnecessary," resumed Durand, "for the determined man sprang quickly in the sleigh when midway over the bridge! It was fully dark, and the snow was blinding the doomed woman! The oiled noose was cast over her neck, and, with a jerk, pulled tightly home! The bridge was almost deserted! The 'executioner' steadied her till the alley at the head was reached! Then she was already dead and frozen stiff! They soon disappeared in different ways. Abandoning all, they were soon in hiding on the wood boats, and are now perfectly safe, scores of miles away! She never uttered a single sound! We had a full report at our Central Section, for the truth is told to us,—and those who helped them away, told the story!" Durand paused. I was shivering at her coolness. "And the poor devil of a driver?" I queried. "Will he not aid the police to trace these men?" "Don't worry about him!" said Durand, coolly. "As for tracing them—oh! no!" coolly replied the quiet-faced woman. "He is undoubtedly now drinking up his money, or feasting on a part of it! When he finally turns up, in a day or so, for a new card (as he has to surrender the old 371, and get another, on his real papers), he will be arrested and locked up two or three weeks. He knows nothing whatever yet of any crime!" "Will he suffer?" said I, with some interest for the stupid driver, so innocent of wrong-doing. "Not at all!" was the quiet response. "He can prove by a dozen that he never left the drinking places till long after her death! His transaction was clear and honest!" "Who wrote the paper found on her breast?" was my last question. "I did!" replied Durand very composed-

ly. "It was a satisfaction to me. It was my duty to do that, and also to verify her death! I went up to the police morgue, and saw her lying there very quiet, in her coffin, last night. I hope no human being will shed a tear! She deserves none! Her very last victim has been betrayed! She will trouble us no more! And, all her kind should meet the same blinding flash of lightning retribution!

"I wish that you would ask Major Trepoff to let me read all the papers we found in her trunk," said Durand. "Being a French woman, I might be of some little use. I know all the ways of the police spies. He will not refuse to trust me, if you ask him. I can trace out her past career; and it may save other innocent lives!" "I will do it," said I; "for I want to tie this Haxo up in this treachery to Hermione! I would like to see that fellow baffled for once—the tiger!"

Trepoff was now soon expected. I had one affair to arrange. "Call that jailer," said I. "I wish you to arrange signals with him so that if General Haxo or any of his kind attempt to visit Hermione to-day, he will let me know at once. The Commander alone has the right. I will have Major Trepoff leave his own man here, so I can notify the Major also if he is in the fortress! They will not dare to remove her to a condemned cell till the sentence is approved by the Privy Council; and that will be held back as long as possible!" The jailer was called, and received my wishes and, another bill. "She is safe, now, till after her sentence is approved; but then,—Ah! it is maddening!" said the devoted French woman, continuing. "If you knew what I know! Our poor people leave their last true stories written in our secret characters in all their cells. Whitewashing, scraping, painting, and all tricks are resorted to; but we finally get at the main facts!" said Durand. "Even accident aids us, and the great number of cases makes these people careless." "Have you secret friends everywhere—in these prisons and stations?" I asked, in a vague wonder. There seemed to be wheels within wheels in Russia! "We have comrades scattered from here to Siberia, and even at the penal island of Saghalien. We have friends

in Odessa and Archangel. We have also circles in Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Berne, London, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco," said the calm woman, with a flush of pride. "You do a large business!" I smiled. "You must know that!" she proudly cried. "Did we not entrap that murderous devil, Colonel Sudeikin, here in the very heart of the guarded city. After forcing out of him all the government secrets, he was then cut to pieces within hearing of his own gend'armes, and by one of his own spies; for he, the betrayer, was betrayed! We had bought the man over! Money and craft are our only useful weapons, till despair drives us to assassination! We do not court terrorism! Yes! we have our loyal friends everywhere," she affirmed, with a growing pride. "Why was the placard pinned on that dead woman's breast?" I then asked. She mused a moment, and then answered: "Firstly—to prevent a great many poor devils from being needlessly arrested, and principally, to terrorize the police—to show them we too, can strike, as we will, when we will! Why, not a single week passes that the imperial family do not receive Nihilist letters at the palace; some are pinned on the hangings, some found in the very cradles of the imperial children—all these things are done now only to show the great Czar that we could reach him, past all his spies, police, and guards! Our sworn companions are everywhere! We could strike terrible blows often! It is not our policy! The Russian government crushes and brutalizes a whole class of subjects at once, by injudicious laws. We but strike a single hated individual, and only then after many repeated warnings! No! we do not love bloodshed. We are human and humane! Our society has its 'propagandists,' its 'moderates,' and its extreme 'terrorists.' We regard our members 'on duty' as engaged in a holy war!—soldiers of the new faith! Our assignments for all desperate work, where an individual is to be 'removed,' are usually made by lot. For special service (not of a bloody nature), our members can be assigned according to their fitness and much of our work demands talent of a high order!" This gloomy colloquy was cut short by the arrival of Major Trepoff. He greeted me gayly, and

told me I would be finally relieved at "tattoo." Handing me several letters, he prepared to attend the Court, which was about to assemble. The Major hastily reported the progress of the day. "I have examined the papers of the governess. We have the most amply damning evidence of her spy connection with the police. We found letters received by her in Russian, and also copies of the answers written by her. Her money accounts and lists of persons she has watched and reported! This proves her perjury! We also found many documents similar to those in the jewel box, on the same paper, and of the same imprint, and old date." I started up now. "Major Trepoff!" I cried. "Will you let this woman examine them? She has seen the governess with Russians around the 'Bon Marché' and other places in Paris!" said I. "The part of that woman might be useful to us now!" "Most certainly!" replied he. "I will go now to the Court and return when Hermione does." He departed. I quickly called the jailer in. He agreed to put Durand out of sight at once, in a spare cell, if General Haxo came, for he might take a fancy to inspect my cell and try to involve me in some of his intriguing talk. We all listened in silence as the guard conveyed our fair prisoner to the now assembled Court. It was for the formal announcement of the verdict! It was only half an hour, till Trepoff returned. His face was very solemn, as he despondently threw himself down in a chair.

"Guilty on every specification!" was the verdict. "The Court was cleared for deliberation," said he, "and the formal sentence will be announced at the afternoon session." We could guess it! The shadow of death hung over us darkly now! There was only heard the sound of broken sobs; for the good Durand had buried her head in her hands. "I know what their grim sentence will be! Death! forthwith!" she said, brokenly. We all gazed gloomily at each other, in a helpless agony. Dimitri Trepoff was a picture of despair. And his lover's heart was shaken at last! "Look here, Trepoff," said I, "you are our mainstay! You must not give way. You are our last hope now! Summon every resource at

once, or we are lost! You must remain here till sunset, or till Haxo leaves; and then try to reach at once the Emperor and Empress. Watch every one like a lynx now! Be sure that revision of sentence does not come back here till we have tried every help! You can at least hold them for a little time in check!" He lifted his head, and his eyes flashed fire. "You are right!" he cried. "I must be a man now—for her sake!" He threw up his fine head. It was only the maddest self-devotion for him to risk place, name, and honor, in an official "duel to the death," with the secret chief. But, for Hermione, he would dare a thousand deaths.

The Major departed. As he might be away when I was discharged, he at once arranged to have the Brigade Major provide me with safe transportation. A reliable companion would be directed to escort me directly to Trepoff's rooms, where I was to pass a few days in retirement. Promising to return, he left to confer with his friend.

"There is yet hope! Work! Try every friend!" whispered Durand.

In an hour, the jailer softly opened my door. "Quick!" said he, to the seamstress. "Here comes General Haxo, across the parade! I will place you in a cell next door." I adjured Durand to have him watch secretly and notify me of all. She gave him these directions with all the power of her secret rank. I waited in all the agony of a vain suspense. Major Trepoff returned at last, and joined me quickly; and the friendly jailer was instantly despatched by him to reconnoiter. General Haxo had entered Hermione's cell. What was his real design? We waited with wildly beating pulses. It was not long till the warder returned, and a few whispered words to the Major caused him to spring up. "Grahame!" said he, "I am going at all risks into her cell! I can not bear this!" His hand was on the door. "My poor darling!" he groaned. "For God's sake! be prudent, Dimitri!" I prayed, as he left. He nodded; but his eyes flashed—for he was love's champion. "I will send you a note by the jailer. You can write me by him. I shall stay with her till her sentence is pronounced. I have the

right!" said he, as he walked down the hall. It was into the lion's den! I excitedly paced my cell in a sad unrest. It was now a dread game of chess for a human life. The stake was that fair woman's love. I felt that I had done all I could, at the prison, and dreamed of some vain effort in the city. Alas! I was powerless, a stranger, and suspected. My friend would now have to watch and prevent the last foul play! I had reminded Trepoff that his friend the Brigade Major, after her sentence, could be warned to make frequent inspections, on behalf of General Davidoff. After the sentence, poor victim, she would be known only by a number; for her very name and identity would be swallowed up on condemnation. Property, rank, and all personal rights were all effaced by a verified sentence. The brutal execution would follow swiftly on the heels of the return of the revision, and its confirmation by the Privy Council seal. For our defenseless one would be at the call of the common hangman! He could strangle her in that dark cell! I hungered for news. The jailer opened my door at last. He gave me a note. It was the Major's report; and my hands trembled, as I tore it open.

Haxo has offered her a mitigation of her sentence if she will confess. She bravely declares she knows nothing. I have at last shown him my special order. He smiled grimly, and we are now in open opposition. He goes directly to the Emperor. I will confer with Tolstoi, and then face him, even before the Czar himself. Hermione is hopelessly resigned. He has gone. I shall take Count Mouravieff's advice. It is the last throw of the dice! God help us all!

Trepoff.

Soon I was joined by Durand, who had eagerly awaited the departure of General Haxo. All was now hazarded on the forlorn hope of awaking the clemency of the Emperor, or the kind Empress. I could do nothing more at the prison, and so, I sadly prepared all my little belongings for departure; for I might be of some use at the city. Here, alas, none! The faithful seamstress would stay for the news of the sentence, and then



return; and she might be the last to see our ill-fated darling. Trepoff came back in a fever of excitement in an hour. He told me he had faced General Haxo flatly, on the question of his mean arts and unduly prejudicing influence; and then told him, before the prisoner, of his own official rights. The General was obliged to obey the order of Count Tolstoi. Trepoff, resolute and fearless, then plainly informed the chief he would personally report to the Minister of the Interior every occurrence, and denounce his bloodthirstiness. General Haxo dared not attack the Major openly, and so his official bitterness could only extend to pushing the sentence. "I shall do my duty!" he growled, in a return defiance.

The Major went to the city to gain news of the inquest and to report our progress. To summon every friend of his clan to beg the poor boon of a woman's life, for the very sake of womanhood itself!

When he was gone, I had the jailer called in; for I was now desperate, and at bay! A thousand roubles procured me the last chance of going to Hermione's cell. The sly old warder posted the sergeant in the corridor below, to warn us of any sudden arrival. I was soon by her side in her cell of death. Hermione was sitting there, gazing out of the one narrow cell window when I entered. It was only a moment that we dared to give way to our feelings. I rapidly told her all the details of the inside workings of the case. I implored her be of good cheer, and then promised that for not one instant would we relax our efforts till all means of respite had been tried to the last. Prayer, love,—all! I did not dare remain in this dim retreat too long. She smiled sadly as she promised to write me a letter with her last directions, in case of the very worst. This Major Trepoff would bring to me. "For, you have been a brother of the heart to me," she cried, as I kissed her trembling hands. I pledged her I would not give a moment to any other duty than her reprieve, and that our whole circle would now continue their prayers up to the very last instant. Every plan was fully explained. She now knew all the slender threads of hope, yet unbroken. The warder was growing visibly nervous as he guarded the door. I

feared to linger there longer lest I might ruin all! And yet, for myself I cared not. I would not be her ruin by my rashness!

"Hermione!" I sadly said, as I unwillingly prepared to go. "You will owe all to Dimitri Trepoff alone, if you are saved. You must know now that he has a claim on you forever! And, may God speed him now!" She smiled through her tears, saying tenderly, "He will not be forgotten in time or in eternity. In another time, in another land, I would have given him a life for a life!" Her bosom rose and fell in a storm of sobs. "But, I am only a devoted woman, and doomed to be a sacrifice! There is but one way out of my dark prison—it leads but to the grave!" she faltered, with a pale face. "Trepoff yet may claim the sweet forfeit of your life and your loving heart—the only return you can make him!" said I, trying to hold to the frail straws of hope. She sadly moved her head in negation. She did not deceive herself. "My good friend,—my own last loyal friend,—you must now go! Do not think too unkindly of me. I have only done my work, allotted by fate, in life! This last perilous quest was forced on me! Never forget that I go to my grave thinking fondly of you and yours!" A sound was heard in the corridors below. She sprang up, pale and trembling. Claspings my arms she quickly said, "Leave me now! We may be betrayed! Do write to me a last word by Dimitri. It will give me strength! I ask you not to leave the city, if you can, till my poor life is finished. You will then know all at the very last. I am woman enough yet to covet your good opinion." Her voice was faltering low in sadness. I dared not linger. She threw her arms around me as I held her defenseless head upon my breast. It was the supreme moment; for the steps of our humble friend were approaching now! From my protecting arms, she slowly receded with her wonderful eyes beaming on me in a last fond adieu. "May God be with you! Go now!" I stood irresolute; and the jailer forced me away. I turned at the door for a last glance. She had buried her face in her hands, with bitter, blinding tears. She saw not my departure. I had to the very last tried to save

her from the felon's death. And now, stumbling along blindly, I was soon in my cell again. It was several hours later when Dimitri Trepoff returned. The inquest was at last over. General Michael had seen the obsequies of the dead governess properly carried out. The public prosecutor suppressed all the testimony so damaging to the police as to the label on her breast. General Zastrow gave this fact to him as indicating their settled prejudice. Colonel Luboff watched all acutely on behalf of the "secret office." Nothing whatever was done to bring out the real character of the deceased, as a "moucharde." And, even General Zastrow dared not protest! Trepoff now informed me that coachman "371" had been, however, apprehended, and was slowly sobering off. His arrest occurred on his reporting for a new ticket as droschky driver. He was a stupid and innocent oaf! Vigorously had he protested his innocence—that he simply sold the horse and sleigh to two unknown men who looked like honest traders, and said they wanted to take a business trip into the outlying villages. It seemed to be a very straight story after all. It was, evidently, not the government policy to delve too deep in this matter. And, a woman's life trembled now in the balance! A doomed woman! General Michael had been ordered to turn all the spy's effects over immediately to the French Legation, whither her official papers and valuables had been sent already. Some powerful influence was shielding the dead governess! And so, the busy, devilish traitress dropped forever out of the minds of men, and slept in the silence of death on the banks of the Neva, near the graves of those victims whom she had betrayed, for ill-gotten "pieces of silver!" New spies would nimbly serve the police officials, and, perhaps, new victims be sent to an untimely grave. The way of a hard, hard world! She was now amenable only before the last awful Court. Her crimes rested lightly upon her head. Her mad love for Serge had, perhaps, forced her to take these final risks in an awful revenge. Dusky shadows now gathered over battlement and wall. Cold blasts shrieked and whistled around me. A dark day for a dark deed! The hour of the judgment came,

and, past my door, harshly tramped along the armed escort bearing rash, ill-starred Hermione to hear her doom! I was forced to linger in impotent sympathy, for the sake of our flickering hopes. Trepoff, with a mute agony written on his brow, went out. A few minutes only passed till he was back, a picture of despair, and the gloomy train marched in with the victim. It was all over! The law had spoken! Dimitri's gloomy words were few. "Death was the sentence; and the papers were ordered made ready for instant approval." All was over! And we were trembling there helpless! The Brigade Major was, however, left on a secret agreement to watch over Hermione till Trepoff had seen the Emperor. He promised that he would come and deliver me at "tattoo." Already, the loyal Major had placed a selected guard over the cell where Hermione was now alone. Dimitri directed the seamstress to reconduct the other woman, who must now finally take leave of Hermione, back to the city. He bade them both await his directions, at his house, so as to have one or the other of them ready for service. And where could we turn, to raise up friends now? He then went to Hermione's cell of judgment. The warder brought the frightened woman who had been the prisoner's companion into my cell, then; and these two last faithful "secret companions of the order" left me, as I promised to see them at Dimitri's house. So, one by one, the little band around Hermione dwindled away! Major Trepoff returned in an hour, and I saw at once that his eyes were clouded. I did not try to pierce his last new griefs, or to learn the details of her feelings. I could divine all this. It had been a good-bye,—perhaps an eternal one! "I will not lose a second's time! Action now! I must save her!" was all his explanation. He was in an exaltation which made him capable of anything. He agreed to try and meet me at his house after I had visited the Zastrows. I was to be kept in the background as far as possible. Nothing must be left to arouse any further resentment of the chief. All depended upon the imperial clemency, and a false step would ruin all. My friend went out of the gloomy fortress. I was now ready for my departure

from prison. Dinner was a mere mockery to me; for, as the night hours dragged on, my deliverance from shame was at hand. I had prepared a last little note to Hermione,—a strong appeal to her own brave womanhood,—to wait till the very summons of death before any rash deed. I feared her wounded pride and the desperation of despair. I sent it in for fear of some interruption. The jailer brought me her reply:

“I will keep my word to you. I am true in life and death, with every fond blessing to the dear ladies, to Dimitri, and to you. With loving prayers for your innocent dear ones. It will be only at the last I would escape the final shame. Trust me! Your                   Hermione.”

I had already warned the jailer, through Durand, that he must see me at every risk, if even at the gates, when all was over. I promised I would richly reward him for the slightest effective service to the doomed woman. Trepoff was to be instantly informed of any last wish or unexpected event, and all papers for me were to be given to him. I thanked God for the power, the latent power, of the gold all men covet; for, even in a prison, it has a magic of its own! This prospective reward was a gauge of his utmost efforts. The time of my enlargement was at hand, and I chafed to go. Soon my luggage was removed, by direction of the kindly adjutant. I waited for the signal which was to release me, counting the minutes. At the very first roll of “tattoo,” the Brigade Major threw open my cell door. I joined him, and then, with a last lingering fond look down the corridor to where Hermione was sitting alone, in the shadow of death, I walked sadly out of those accursed prison doors, past the half-wild sentinels, and stood in the welcome biting night air—a free man at last! It all seemed to have been a horrid dream; for I was free—free at last! Glancing up at the row of gloomy casemates, I saw the light still glimmering in her cell. With a last prayer on my lips for her, I jumped into the sleigh. The driver held back his wild horses. The adjutant’s kind invitation to his quarters was quickly refused. I was soon speed-

ing away over the long bridge where the spy had died in silence. I shuddered as I passed the scene of her death. A trusty sergeant, well armed, was seated by my side. I soon re-entered Zastrow's house. I was clasped in my forgiving sister Justine's arms once more! And there were no words wasted in vain regret of the past. General Michael had prepared her for my return with great delicacy. No one else appeared. I directed my return to be announced to my own beloved Madeleine for the next morning. She was now able to see me, and had been made aware of the cloud of trouble which menaced the future of our whole circle. The physician now insisted on her quiet and our speedy departure. Alas! there was but one sad event to detain me—the gloomy certainty of Hermione's fate. I could not leave her to perish! With a few words to explain my duties, I left the dear child, who was now anxious to see me forgiven. Dashing away, I was soon at Trepoff's home, and met the joyous Serge, who received me with open arms, as out of the house of bondage. Dimitri was even now with the Komaroffs and Count Mouravieff, conferring on the appeal to the Emperor. The last forlorn hope! Worn out and exhausted, I slept a dreamless sleep in the comfortable rooms allotted me. For the hand of fate seemed to be against us all! As I closed my eyes, I fondly thought of the poor, lonely, and devoted Hermione, held within the stony grip of those massive walls, whose every echo only tells of broken hearts—where death reigns “in the name of the Czar!”



## BOOK III.—LED BY LOVE.

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### CHAPTER XI.

#### AT TSARSKOE ZELOE — GENERAL HAXO TRAPPED — VERA'S VICTORY — A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

Morning in St. Petersburg! Dark and gloomy with-out; within, the luxury of Trepoff's rooms defied the Ice King, and, worn out, I slept oblivious to my changed conditions. No booming gun called me, but Dimitri's own friendly hand roused me early; and then I realized that I was among friends, thank heaven, once more.

"Wake up, my prisoner!" was his cheery salutation. "Here! Look over these documents as soon as you can throw on your gown. I will send the woman in to you. I must breakfast now, and try to catch the nine o'clock train to Tsarskoe Zelo Palace. The ordeal will come on there! The Emperor is there! General Haxo went down last night!" Dimitri threw over to me the bundle of documents found in M<sup>lle</sup> Dauvray's trunk. My coffee was soon served, and then Madame Durand entered. I cut short all her kindly congratulations on my enlargement as I handed to her the bundle of papers, saying, "Lose not a moment! Examine each one of these, as if your life depended on it! You will surely know the meaning of many, which are only blind words to our friends." She seated herself at the anteroom window, and I rapidly dressed. I disposed of my coffee and awaited Durand's report. She was heard in frequent exclamations of surprise. In twenty minutes, the Major now entered. He was in his full gala uniform, and ready to meet his sovereign to battle for innocence against deadly craft! "General Michael will be here soon. We are to take the nine o'clock train, and the locksmith, too, goes with us, in charge of my old or-



derly. Count Mouravieff has kindly promised me to come down on the train, too, as soon as the morning council is over. He will also personally keep the confirmed sentence of Hermione, without the seal, in his possession, until the very last positive word from the Emperor himself. So, now, there can be no treachery!" While we conferred, the woman had finished examining all the papers. She called me. In a few words, she explained that all the Nihilistic documents were exactly similar, in date and time, to those found in the jewel box. A part of the same plant! They were all old matters, which had evidently been in police hands before. Probably supplied to the spy by the police, and the whole stock had once formed part of some general seizure. It was a clumsy enough dodge! In a land where the possession of terrorist papers meant death, almost anything was enough, with a defenseless prisoner, to bring about a fatal sentence from a too-complaisant court. I looked at them. They were seemingly identical with the printed matters used at the trial. Several account books and records also conclusively proved the past receipt of large sums by the dead spy from police headquarters; others showed that she had received moneys from the well-known Russian agents in Paris. Her trade was but too self-evident! In none of the papers found in Hermione's box, did her supposed name directly appear. They evidently knew not her real name; and, therefore, feared to use any alias, not knowing what foreign credentials she might later produce on her trial. And so, even they were not too sure of their victim! A few private letters proved that the dead spy had really possessed a heart once, and some loving friends of a personal nature. Her own romance was all hidden under the weight of by-gone years; for the friends of her youth, if any still lived, would vainly wait for her return from the banks of the Neva. In a short time, Dimitri, who now understood all, folded them up, and a special mark was placed on them. "I am ready," he said, as if he was going into action. We now awaited General Zastrow's arrival. Serge was unable to go down to the palace; for the run of an hour by train and all the tedious official formality.

might be entirely too much for his yet green wound. He had, however, authorized the Major to use his name in complete confirmation of the history, and, volunteered a deposition. We made all ready, and soon a sleigh dashed up. General Zastrow sent in for Trepoff. I went out to bid them godspeed, and was strangely cheered by the projected face to face interview.

General Michael was now in calm mental balance, and very anxious to close the whole family matter, and so facilitate my early departure. A brief note from my sister told me I was expected at breakfast. While the head of the family was away, I well knew that tender-hearted Barbe Zastrow would extend the olive branch. I learned that Vera, the impulsive little Princess, supported by Madame Komaroff and the Countess Mouravieff, would write also in an appeal to the merciful and gracious Empress while the two gentlemen were with the Czar. I obtained from Trepoff an official card to the Brigade Major, asking him to let Madame Durand see the warder, and find out what the lonely imprisoned Hermione might need. If no accident happened to prevent, then, Durand was to let her know we were all at work. We would have report of her safety also. Alas! it was all that we could do. Serge and I waved a "Good-bye" as the three splendid black Orloff trotters dashed away, with a jingle of bells. They were now off to meet their official foe. Tsarskoe Zeloe is a magnificent pile of buildings, embowered in superb gardens, and a favorite palace of the Russian Czars. Not as gloomy as the "Winter Palace," though less rich; not as storied as "Peterhoff," with all its faded glories and haunted memories of beauties long forgotten,—it is still beloved by all; for there is hanging over it no dark record of murder and treason, no tragedy of the past throws a gloomy shadow over the suspicious, care-haunted ruler of Russia, while in its guarded walls. The railway from the metropolis is under the special charge of the secret police. Nothing is permitted to be on the line when royalty travels. The Czar's favorite retreat is a bower of witching loveliness. The score of miles between it and the city are beautiful suburbs of the great new capital—a favorite resort of

the trusted aristocracy. I directed Durand to await my orders, and then leave for the fortress, when I went to the Admiralty quai. So, Serge and I were free to count these hours of the all-important day. Serge Zastrow was overjoyed at my release. He had not as yet been officially called to account for the slaying of General Radzivil. Cards by the dozens had been left, but the dead man was not referred to. Evidently, some restraining influence had quieted general gossip. I well knew Haxo would cover the awkward break in his game. This was much aided by the fact that Radzivil, by birth, was a Pole; the higher Russians always treating them with hauteur, dislike, and the victor's cold disdain of a conquered nation. The few Polish nobles adhering to the Russian crown were secretly despised, for all knew that the great princely Polish families were almost exterminated when bloody Mouravieff said, "There are no more Poles," after the last revolution. Spy and police agent marked down all who were forgotten by the bayonet, and the prisons swallowed them up!

While we were preparing our mercy-seeking embassies, in a grand room at Tsarskoe Zeloe, a tall, soldierly man sat looking at the morning sun struggling in the east with the pale yellow fogs of a Russian winter.

The long tier of recessed windows commanded a rare view down the alleys, where nature sweetly smiles in the short but rich northern summer. He was sitting in the cabinet of arms. The whole grand apartment is a museum of the splendid trophies of tributary or conquered princes of the east. Russia's onward march is pictured there. The panelled ceiling is superbly decorated in carved work of cunning skill. It is indeed a cabinet fit for the Czar of all the Russias. Every wall bears great clusters of carefully arranged jeweled Oriental arms. Saber, scimeter, yataghan, curved kriss, and priceless old blades torn from the grasp of the proud Asiatics, hang here, far from their places of origin. Matchlock, pistol, and rifle, silent now, are hanging there. Shields, coats of mail, and gorgeous trappings adorn the recesses. Plumes, feathered tufts, richest furs, and scores of captured banners, and pennons, attest the

wide swath cut by the Circassian saber, and the deadly work of the Cossack lance. It is a tribute to the resistless Russian sword. Gold and silver, shimmering pearl, and blazing jewels cover these historic weapons. Great pale turquoises, amber Oriental topaz, deep rich sapphires, rubies lit with fiery glow, and the rarest flashing diamonds, stud and gem stock, gripe and hilt. The arms of captured kings hang useless here! The mosaic floor recalls the days of old Byzantium; and, even the window drapings, from Oriental loom and needle, are a king's ransom. It is the spoil of "Ormuz and the farther Ind." In the middle of the room, a sunken octagonal floor is reached by descending marble steps of rare vein and exquisite color. A table, with its octagonal top, made of one huge slab of precious green malachite, occupies the central space. This priceless piece is covered by a magnificent tent, supported on eight clusters of curiously-inlaid spears and lances. The tent and hangings, festooned in graceful, arched openings, are Indian shawls of exquisite delicacy and the rarest Turkish and Persian embroideries. The eye revels in the richness of the drowsy East. From the summits of these arched draperies, hang the horse-tail ensigns of great Pashas, once defeated in bitter wars. A grand jeweled imperial ornament surmounts this royal marquée, which rises nearly to the lofty ceiling.

At the center table, sat Alexander Romanoff, the mighty ruler of ninety millions:—the heir of the great Kings of the East. Genghis and Timour, Tamerlane and mighty Rurik,—all the old shadowy war chiefs of the Orient, have left their Empire to the Russian Czar, and still the hungry Russian eagle spreads his wing. From the frozen White Sea,—thousands of miles to Behring Straits from the cove of Archangel to Odessa Bay;—from Warsaw to Kiachta and Vladivostock,—the great domain, founded on conquest and held by the sword, stretches out vast and wide.

One stalwart, bearded colossal blue-eyed soldierly man, proud, patriotic, haughty and intensely autocratic, rules "by Divine Grace," a hundred blended nations. He lives a stranger to his polyglot people, guarded by

grovelling gensd'armes and controlled by feeble bureau officials. He wields the heaviest sceptre on earth! The wonderful life of Russia is natural, not governmental. The great land is rich by nature, with the undeveloped treasures of a dozen varying grand divisions. It is strong only, in that intense unshakable patriotism, which binds the hardy Muscovite to serve the White Czar blindly. The Russ is ever ready to die for God and the Czar, without a murmur. A hundred palaces, a thousand domains are his; a million of armed men serve the Emperor. Yet, the blood-red billet of the fanatic Nihilist secretly finds its way to his eye. It is pinned on the pillow where the uneasy head of the greatest absolute despot on earth seeks repose. The thorn lurking under the Imperial Rose draws blood! Simple in tastes, averse to all splendor, save on great state occasions, devoted to his immediate family, Alexander III. pushed out the map of Russia to the Persian gulf for that sea outlet so ardently longed for by all his subjects. And to his son, his pallid dead finger points the way! Constantinople and the German frontier were always in his mental vision, with that long line of the Danube, marked by the tombs of so many hundreds of thousands of Russians.

The hereditary war with the Turk has been the plague of Russia. Internal peace, national progress is neglected for mere ambition of conquest, laid down in the sacred hereditary policy.

Here, too, are stumbling blocks! Reform has been a failure,—emancipation a thankless task. And yet, the gradual development of the greatest power on earth goes on resistlessly. It was with a gloomy brow the Emperor awaited General Haxo. A full private report the evening before had been made by the chief, who urged the speedy execution of Hermione "for urgent reasons!" His eager desire to cut off pardon was to get her in his hands, and then wring from the tortured woman that fuller knowledge his spies and crafty underlings could not gain. He knew well that, once turned over to the executioner, the dark walls of the fortress would hide forever the secret of her last agonies from the outer world. The seal of the Privy Council would signify the Czar's

"pleasure." The divine right of kings! Oh! shameless lie of abject humanity, groaning under the burden of misery, goaded on by a tyrant's sword! And yet, Europe has hugged the darling fiction for a thousand years! Chamberlain and page, body guard of fierce Circassians and grenadier sentry, all waited around the peerless pavilion.

The General had begged for an immediate audience. He was now all too impatient to surmount Minister Tolstoi's order to Major Trepoff, with the sign manual of the Emperor, directing the fair prisoner to be turned over to the "secret bureau" for execution. And then General Haxo's time would come at last! The Emperor lingered reluctant in thought. It was, after all, a woman—only another poor mad woman, gifted, dangerous, beautiful, rich, self-devoted, in a cause which can only claim "ultimate destruction" as a war cry. Of what avail her death? He disliked to increase the iron severity of police rule. While he lingered lost in doubt and General Haxo chafed in impatience, the chamberlain announced Major Trepoff and General Zastrow on the same dismal matter. The ruler of Russia sighed. He was now forced to consider! The Emperor's brow grew very stern. He would see all these people face to face. General Haxo was admitted first, bowing most coldly to the two gentlemen in the anteroom as he passed. Michael Zastrow begged the Major to be calm. "Do not ruin us all now!" he beseeched. They were ushered in to the imperial presence, and the fight for a life began. General Haxo had his work all but done. To be simply dismissed with the Emperor's confirming order gave him the instant right to demand a sealed warrant from the Privy Council. He only feared Count Mouravieff, whose wily courtier skill was as renowned as his great past services to the crown. "Proceed, gentlemen!" said the Emperor. "I have had a full report of this unfortunate business from General Haxo." The Emperor's face was grave—his voice cold! He was wearied of the unwelcome subject. General Zastrow, on behalf of his entire family, now tremblingly asked the commutation of the sentence of Hermione to mere deportation, as a state

prisoner, to Siberia, and not as a convict. The Emperor's brow was gloomy. He was silent. Pardon was hopeless, Trepoff felt. Mitigation was possible, and then further effort could be made afterwards. All must be done now, and his blood boiled. "The Court sentence seems to clearly point to the most overwhelming evidence against the woman," said the Emperor. "Sire!" said Trepoff, quietly, "I, too, implore your august clemency. I have every reason to believe the case against this lady was aggravated by hatred, and the work of a police woman spy. The prisoner may have been very imprudent as to her illegal passport, but of the graver charge, she is innocent! On that alone she was condemned to death. The passport matter was a mere irregularity! I watched her trial myself, on behalf of Count Tolstoi. There has been either a fearful mistake—or worse," deliberately remarked Trepoff, fixing his eye steadily on General Haxo.

"Can you prove this, Major?" said the Emperor, his brow lightening visibly. "I think I can, Sire," said Dimitri. "I will stake my life upon it!" "General Haxo!" suddenly commanded the Emperor. "Give me your précis of the proofs in this case. I wish to make no mistake here. This looks grave!" Haxo presented his special notes used in the evening audience. The Emperor scanned the lines in silence for a few moments. "Major, what have you to say in answer to the findings of the Court? General Haxo, read aloud that record!" directed the Emperor, now quite interested; for the quiet champions were glaring at each other, in the bitterest determination. Haxo calmly read it, closing, "May it please your Majesty, this woman is known to be dangerous. She should be questioned to the utmost as to her accomplices. Questioned by the 'secret bureau'—before her execution!" He was confident. "Now, Major Trepoff," resumed the Emperor, turning his steady eye upon the young man. Dimitri calmly said: "Sire, the prisoner never saw the papers found in her jewel box till they were produced at her trial. They were all placed there by a paid agent of the police the night General Radzivil was killed and, it was an infamous trick!" Haxo

glared at Trepoff, who awaited his eager reply. "Sire, on behalf of the police, I deny this; and I beg your Majesty to order the proofs submitted!" Haxo was angered. "Let Major Trepoff prove this!" "There is the proof!" calmly said Trepoff, as he laid the two keys, tied together by the notary, with his ribboned seal attached, on the Emperor's table. The Emperor, in silence, eyed the opposing champions, and picked up the keys, gazing at them intently. General Haxo started. "It is a trap!" he cried; and yet, he could not leave the imperial presence for any conference with his subordinates. What had happened? He was puzzled. "What is all this?" said the Czar, with a stern glance at Haxo. "Sire, one is the real key of the jewel case, in which the papers were found by the police—the proof on which this poor lady was summarily condemned. The other, is the one actually used to open the box and put in the documents by a paid police spy. The key was paid for, and the incriminating papers furnished by the subordinate police." "Under whose orders?" said the now indignant Emperor. "Under the orders of General Haxo, I presume," said the undaunted Major. "General!" the Emperor remarked gravely, "can you deny this? Your people may have made—an awful mistake." "I can, your Majesty!" said he, with flashing eyes. "Sire! Let me go on and prove it!" firmly continued Trepoff, as the Czar signed to him to proceed. General Haxo's eyes were shining in impotent rage. Trepoff then briefly told the whole story of the fraud, while Haxo stood amazed. He referred to the label on the dead woman's breast; the fact of her lying as to the Russian language; the papers from her trunk were then produced by Trepoff, and the old age of the documents was referred to. Trepoff proved the similarity of the papers in her trunk to the ones conveyed into the jewel box. Wagon loads of them could be had in the police archives. There was nothing to link Hermione to any knowledge of them.

General Haxo craved a word here. It was granted. "Who took these papers from the dead woman's trunk?" he said, in agitation. "General Zastrow and myself!" rejoined Trepoff—"with other witnesses."



The Emperor was impatient to conclude. "What further proofs have you that the French woman was a police spy?" questioned the Czar, with a moody brow. He was now ashamed of his agents. "I have the very man here in waiting in the anteroom who made the false key, and then, opened the box for your spy," soberly said the Major, now facing the maddened General Haxo. The Czar's brow grew menacing. A last thrust now! Haxo was standing, open-eyed and aghast. "All this does not connect me with the French woman," said the police General, defiantly, as the Emperor gazed darkly from one to the other of the contestants. It was war to the hilt!

"No! General Haxo; but *this does!*" said the triumphant Trepoff, respectfully handing the last "order to report" to the Emperor. "May I ask, Sire, that General Haxo will say if he wrote that?" There was murder in Haxo's gleaming eyes now! The Czar signalled to the chief, who looked at it. He groaned, and then stood mute. It was useless to deny the fact! It was his own handwriting! The magic fires of love blazed up in Dimitri's heart. He was on the verge of conquest. Oh, God, for the certainty of victory! "Where was this letter found, Major?" questioned the Czar. "On the dead spy's person!" was the reply of Trepoff. The Czar looked at General Haxo, whose head was bowed. One last desperate ruse—a last shot! He rallied to save himself now! "She may have stolen that paper!" he protested. "General, she did not steal these!" said Trepoff, as he laid the last packet of Haxo's orders to the dead woman on the table. "These were found in her trunk at the Zastrow mansion, and we all can prove it!"—and he laid a packet on the table before the angered Czar. General Haxo was a scorpion surrounded by avenging fire. He dared not even raise his eyes to his master's face. A diversion saved him. The chamberlain announced Count Mouravieff, the President of the Privy Council. With evident relief, the angry Czar ordered his admittance. Count Mouravieff was presented to his sovereign, who greeted the great noble with warmth. A glance from the two friends told the veteran diplomat that all was going on

well, so far. The old courtier waited for his chance to get in a thrust. "Have you this poor woman's sentence before your Council for confirmation?" said the Czar to Mouravieff. The old noble bowed gravely. "I have, your Majesty; and I am so deeply interested in it that I brought it here, as yet unsealed, to crave your clemency in this very strange case," said the Count. "Proceed, Nicolas Nicolaeivitch!" ordered the sovereign. Mouravieff was not averse to giving the "new school factotum" a lesson, on behalf of the old families and nobles. "Sire," said Mouravieff, "I regret to say that my friend Serge Zastrow was provoked into a fatal duel at the opera, when escorting this lady, by that renegade Pole, General Radzivill. The lady had never seen nor spoken to him, and Serge had no quarrel. Lieutenant Zastrow will soon marry my kinswoman, Princess Vera Komaroff. His own life was fiercely sought by this dead duelist, who had craftily killed a fellow nobleman once, in the foulest manner. He was a worthless renegade, and a disgrace to your Majesty's service. May it please your Majesty, General Haxo was responsible for the presence of that man (whom I know was a secret police agent under pay) in the imperial box. It was his duty sworn also to have prevented that duel. But he allowed it to proceed! The wrong man was killed—that is all! Lieutenant Zastrow will crave an audience of your Majesty when he recovers, and beg for an official investigation of why this quarrelsome man was thus set on him. That disgraceful scandal occurred on the very night when this jewel box was opened and these fatal documents inserted. Some hidden influence hounds that poor woman down to the grave. I venture, as Chief of the Privy Council, to observe that such deeds and such methods make the duty of your responsible Council very painful. We cannot face the assembly of nobles when their oldest families are treated with such vile duplicity. I know," he concluded, with a glance of scorn at General Haxo, "that the hospitality of Michael Zastrow's house has been dishonored by these petty police villainies. Every word of the proofs offered by Major

Trepoff is true! He has consulted me in every step of this matter!"

General Haxo came for the fatal mandate to give Hermione over to the executioner. He was now trapped and caught, at his own low practices. The Czar mused a moment, and all eyes were riveted on him as he spoke.

"General Haxo," said he, in a stern voice, "you will desist after this from the slightest interference in this wretched case! It is now out of your hands, forever! Count Mouravieff, I charge you with a special and immediate report in this matter to my private secretary! Withhold, by my order, the seal of the Council. The sentence of death is indefinitely suspended! Major Trepoff," he continued, "you will continue to have strict personal charge of this prisoner, and report at once to General Davidoff, that no one shall be allowed to visit this prisoner, save on special order of the Privy Council, countersigned by Count Tolstoi and noted by you! Michael Alexandrovitch!" concluded the autocrat, kindly, "I am pleased to find that your household is as loyal to-day as always of old. I shall consider the matter of the final disposition of this imprudent woman at once." A deathly silence reigned in the room where a woman's life had been fought for and not in vain. Alexander rose, the four gentlemen retired to the anteroom. Without a word, the defeated and humbled Haxo threw on his sable cloak and left, unsaluted by any one. Mouravieff's eyes twinkled with satisfaction. The kindly manner of the Czar and his reception of their final reverence assured them that Hermione's life was saved. Trepoff was as pale as if he were of the dead, and his hands trembled as he grasped Mouravieff's slender fingers. Any other penalty, she had brought on herself in her mysterious quest. Still, her life was saved, and shame averted!

Count Mouravieff directed Major Trepoff to send him forthwith all the evidence, and to hold the frightened locksmith ready and subject to his personal orders. It was a merry party which returned to Petersburg. The two ambassadors of mercy were speechlessly grateful to the powerful ex-Premier for his gracious help. He had

been the trump card! Mouravieff was too great a man for Haxo to pull down. He dared not try to involve him. The old Count pleasantly accepted their thanks, and went home pleased; for he had shown the police wolf an old fox trick. Triumph shone in Dimitri Trepoff's eyes as he dashed into my room with the news. He was off, in mad haste, as quick as his swift sleigh could be harnessed, to bear the positive order to the Commandant, taking Hermione at once out of "all police jurisdiction," and safe from any immediate death penalty. As a state prisoner, she could not be removed to the condemned cell, and her treatment would be suitable to her rank. The joyous Major ordered Madame Durand to hasten to the prison and share every moment of Hermione's captivity. A liberal *douceur* made the seamstress quite content. Her greater happiness shone in her eyes, as she turned to me when Dimitri disappeared. The sad child of an untoward destiny smiled on me. "Noble man! May God reward him!" was her prayer; in which I joined with all my heart and soul. Serge Zastrow was a wildly happy man when he heard the news. The splendid and spirited conduct of Count Mouravieff reassured him. There was no last obstacle now to his forthcoming marriage with the lovely Princess Vera. On the wild music of the winter wind rose a sound of distant bells! Wedding bells they seemed to be to the joyous sailor. There was no one's interests to be served by lingering over the fate of the renegade Polish nobleman. The Zastrows and Komaroffs were now safe from Haxo's schemes. He dared not again incur the just resentment of the great Mouravieff, whose brother, the General, ruled over one-half of the great Siberian Russia. They were seated on the steps of the throne, where Haxo was but a stranger. Merrily rang out the sleigh bells, as I sat in the troika, flying down the river bank to the Zastrow mansion. I was soon in the salon, where the hostess and Justine awaited me. The other ladies, Princess Vera, Madame Komaroff, and the adroit Countess Mouravieff, were still with the Empress at the Winter Palace. But there was no shadow of death around us now! Justine led me to my dear Made-

leine's room, where I found a welcome such as I had longed for. Bright and lovely was my cherished invalid, and still innocent of all the dangers I had passed through. It was a prelude to a happier time. Our little junta was not long in deciding that we would leave as soon as possible for Germany, moving on later to Paris. A few months of quiet would bury all the gossip, and those rumors of the mysterious occurrences which had made the time-honored Zastrow mansion the theater of an averted tragedy. Daughter of Eve, my curious Madeleine essayed to speak of Hermione. "Not a word yet, dearest!" said I. "When she is out of that gloomy prison—when we are far over the frontier—you shall know all. And also the sweet woman who is to be my wife! But, Hermione must first unseal my lips!" I knew that her life was at stake. Happiness was spreading white wings over our little circle once more. Madeleine longed now ardently for the welcome shores of our own dear land. I felt my heart bound with pride as I thought of the first glimpse of the dear old flag flying on Sandy Hook! And I, too, yearned for the quiet streets of Philadelphia. It was a pleasant breakfast table that day, though General Michael had prudently gone to the palace to supplement the ladies' petition. Madame Barbe was radiant with joy. Her husband had given her the morning news. Tender and womanly, she joined her gentle influence to that of the enthusiastic Vera. She urged the powerful circle to save the "lonely unknown." A new lady companion had charge of the pretty daughter now. The dead governess was not referred to. Madame Zastrow shuddered to think of her graceful girl under such treacherous guidance. In the early afternoon the "ladies of the merciful quest" returned, radiant and thankful. Success was theirs!

Marie Alexandrovna, Princess Dagmar, Empress of all the Russias, received the suitors in her splendid state boudoir at the White Palace. The two great social queens were graciously welcomed. A smile of kindly greeting was awarded the vivacious little Princess Vera, whose dark eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. Count Mouravieff and Major Trepoff had informed the two

elder ladies of all the strong points of the case. They trusted now to Vera's enthusiasm and the well-known tenderness of the gentle and lovable Empress for the young ladies of her Court. Vera anxiously described the whole acquaintance with Hermione. The Empress was deeply touched when the Princess described the sufferings of the innocent ladies of our family, and the fearful duel forced on Serge Zastrow. In burning words, her scorn of the cowardly plot to take Hermione's life was imparted to the Empress. "Methods used by the police to drag down victims by such treachery were unworthy of the Russian name," urged Vera, as she unfolded, bit by bit, the whole dastardly plan to forfeit Hermione's womanhood. "But, what can I do, my dear child?" gently said the Czarina. "Your Majesty, all the gentlemen of our family, with the dear friendly Count Mouravieff, have gone to Tsarskoe Zelo to pray that her life may be spared! We beg your Majesty to personally ask the gracious Emperor to save her from the scaffold; for she is a helpless woman, and her greatest crime only imprudence—mere folly!" The girl's pleading voice touched the sympathetic sovereign. Madame Komaroff ventured also to dwell upon the serious embarrassment of Governor General Komaroff in Poland if the death of such a renegade and doubtful character as Radzivill was in any way avenged on a woman, however imprudent. The government could not face such a public scandal, nor attempt to justify a clearly murderous quarreler, in directly seeking Serge Zastrow's life. Radzivill was far too well known. Countess Mouravieff also assured the Empress that her husband approved of every plea made, and that he had personally joined in the joint intercession. The insolence of the unscrupulous chief, in making the time-honored Zastrow family mansion the scene of such a low villainous deed, made her indignant, as she bravely declared that General Haxo had not only personally robbed Hermione through his selected spy, but had also set on Radzivill to kill Serge Zastrow to revenge an honest woman's repulse. "Why kill Serge Zastrow?" asked the simple-hearted Empress. "Because the ablest agent of the General, that fearful French wo-

man, loved Serge, and desired to revenge herself on him. Haxo only wanted to trap 'our unknown visitor,' for the darkest reasons. In return for the final ruin of Hermione, he had placed Radzivill in the hands of the revengeful woman, as a co-operating secret agent; and to skillfully murder Zastrow was the Dauvray's vengeance!" The Empress' bright eyes kindled. "And you are so deeply interested in Serge, Princess Vera?" She was a smiling woman now, even under a crown's crushing weight. The lovely girl blushed crimson as she knelt and kissed the Empress' delicate white hand. Her cheeks told the story which failed upon her trembling lips. But, she took on a desperate courage, born of kindness. "He is to marry me, your Majesty! He risked his life to prevent General Haxo's wicked schemes. I ask this one favor, on my knees, for Serge's sake. His cousin led your guards into the Grivitska redoubt. We all will pray to God for your Majesty." "For Serge's sake be it, my sweet child!" said the Empress. "Rise! I will do all that I can." The dark imperial eyes were now tenderly fixed on the loving girl. With smiling lips the Czarina pronounced these kindly words. The two grateful ladies joined in Vera's murmured thanks. It was a happy hour for all these true woman hearts, attuned to mercy and goodness by the gracious lady of the ice king. "I cannot promise you an entire pardon," said the Empress, gravely. "You do not really know yet who this prisoner is! Some old family or love affair may have driven her into her dangerous associations. I would like to know her real story," mused the graceful Czarina. "She was in grave error to come in our land under a false name, and without legal papers. She has brought great sorrow on all your circle, and so the innocent suffer ever for the guilty. But I will do what I can for you, as a wedding present for your Serge!" "Gracious Majesty!" said Countess Mouravieff. "Major Trepoff already knows much of her story. Her fatal position was forced on her by a mere accident. I was on the train. I know she would have gone peacefully away if General Haxo had not driven her to use false colors. Arrest and the ruin of all would have fol-

lowed any exposure there. Our laws are so strict that people who are not criminals must use some subterfuge to come here, and leave under assumed names. She is clearly guiltless of any other serious crime, and is certainly a woman of rank, education, and the highest graces." "But, her attempted suicide!" said the Czarina, in doubt. "Every prisoner has a story ready. There is a kindness which is mere credulity!" "Your Majesty," quietly said the elder Princess Komaroff, "I am the wife of a Governor General. I know the fearful horrors of an imprisonment in our forts, for a woman of any station. It is hard enough for a robust peasant. I am appealed to, often, in Warsaw, and I do all I can to soften the misery of women suspects. My husband will tell you that I worry him enough," said she, brightly. "He fears to have me even come in his cabinet. The fortress on the Neva is said to be a fearful place! Think of such a woman in an underground condemned cell! No friend, no limit to the last miseries! It is terrible!" cried the spirited Princess, her voice quivering. "It breaks my heart to see the severity in Poland. This lady preferred death to the last horrible tortures, and she too well knew why General Haxo was following her up! His cold design was to force a confession from her by secret pressure or torture! Whatever be her private history, she was guilty of no overt attempt, and the whole world knows the fearful severity of our private police. She preferred death to the touch of the common executioner,—or worse." "I would myself!" said Madame Komaroff, her eyes flashing. The angels of mercy were beating white wings unseen around the sweet Czarina. "This is very true," murmured the Czarina. "I will think it all over. I am not disposed to have this poor woman harassed further. But, the Council rules in all matters as to the safety of the imperial family. It would be terrible if we personally were forced to carry the whole burden." The Empress then bowed her head; but her eyes were moist. She had to bear her own part of the national burden of sorrow. Her beloved consort's every-day life was a temptation to the assassin! His voyages by rail and carriage exposed him to the knife, pistol, or bomb. Even



her own royal infants were threatened. On their pillows were found pinned notes of fearful significance. Their death was even threatened, and also dark menaces to steal them away, and bring them up in squalor and misery were used to terrorize the imperial mother's heart! A dauphin of France had died once under servants' blows! Why not a Czarovitch? These are the shadows of a throne! "The Emperor is kindly and easily moved to clemency," resumed the pensive Czarina. "The Council will certainly insist on the deportation of your mysterious visitor to Siberia. That I cannot prevent; but I can greatly mitigate it! She will be 'only a state prisoner,'—not a convict,—and there is a great radical difference in treatment of the 'deported' and those condemned to penal servitude. As a 'state prisoner' her troubles will be merely the social eclipse—and, pardon comes in time." "Your gracious Majesty," said Madame Mouravieff, "the General, my husband's brother, writes me from Irkutsk, there are many hidden oppressions of the women sent to Siberia." A light shown on the Empress' lovely face. "I thank you, Madame. I have long determined to ask the Emperor to allow me to send an officer of my own selection to Siberia, to examine and report, secretly, on the treatment of these women prisoners of state. I will do so now! I shall ask him to send your 'nameless lady' under escort of that same officer. She will thus be spared any indignity on the voyage. If you find her worthy, and Count Mouravieff shall approve, she can be quietly pardoned at some future day. I wish to select an officer of tried character and experience—one who is above any duplicity. He must be of my own selection and a man not connected with the police!" concluded the dreaming Czarina. It was her pet project. The ready wit of Madame Mouravieff was a boon to the suppliants now; for she saw the golden opportunity, and acted on the instant. "May it please your Majesty, Major Dimitri Trepoff has my husband's highest esteem. His record as an officer is a peerless one. He is young, active, and sympathetic, and I hope he would be worthy of such a distinction as to represent you. A Grand Duke has honored him with

the place of Chief Aid, and his experience is vast! Moreover, his leaving the Court, on duty, would arouse no remark. The officials in Siberia could not know his purpose, or prepare for his visit. With well-known bureau agents, they could disguise the truth!" The Czarina replied: "Countess, you may then ask your husband to present Major Trepoff to me at once. President Mouravieff can give the Major secret letters to his brother the General at Irkutsk. I have the greatest esteem, too, for Dimitri Trepoff! I shall ask the Emperor to charge him with the prisoner's delivery to her station, if the Emperor commutes the sentence." The sun seemed to smile in the kindly eyes of the graceful Czarina. The Empress rose, and the ladies respectfully kissed her bounty-dealing hand—only strong in kindness and mercy. They were radiant! It was an inspiration of the adroit, court-wise Countess Mouravieff to advance the interests of her favorite, Major Trepoff. Russian ladies devotedly adore gallantry in the field. Dimitri's great "white-cross" was a blessing to him on this auspicious day. Cupid, rosy god, was aiding a love which from a palace through a prison, past the waiting scaffold, was to lead the devoted Trepoff far over the sparkling snows, mountain-girdled lakes, and dim, picturesque gorges of Siberia. Forest and plain, glen and winding river, sweeping to the blue Pacific, lay before the devoted pilgrim of love. The audience over, the ladies returned, with thankful hearts, to the mansion on the English quai. No one knew of Dimitri's devoted love but I. My heart gave a bound of joy, unnoticed, as the Countess related the hopes of the future. Her principal interest was for Trepoff's advancement, as this would place him high in the favor of the gentle, delicate Czarina. A marked man at the glittering court would be the favored one of the Czarina. I bided my time. We only studied to counteract any future wiles of General Haxo, and Trepoff was far away, ignorant of this great boon. The skillful lady diplomatists, all versed in Russian intrigue, agreed that the baffled General Haxo would not dare to further risk his great official power and his valuable place by any special persecution of Hermione. The mere in-

timation of the Empress' personal interest would neutralize his enmity forever. A more solid obstacle to his design, too, was the impregnable elevation of Nicolas Mouravieff, who, in a twenty-years grapple as Crown Servant, Ambassador, and War Councilor, had devotedly followed the imperial mandates. Fear might supplement Haxo's awakened prudence. Such a princely foe would be too powerful for the sly chief. Behind him were arrayed the two families, and the old nobles of the Court. Our little cabal broke up. The two Komaroff ladies departed to confer with the President, and accompanied Countess Mouravieff to her stately mansion on the Moika. I was filled with a secret joy, for I knew Trepoff's heart secret. I decided to abide with Trepoff until the ultimate disposition of Hermione's fate. It was not well to remain tête-à-tête in the house, where all were now glad to drop the harassing question of the hour. I wished also to baffle society's curiosity. Now that our course was lined out, Dimitri, Serge and myself, with the ladies and Count Mouravieff, would follow out the good work. All seemed to feel that General Zastrow and his family needed quiet, and to be kept as far out of current events as possible. They had surely suffered enough. Pleased and eager to aid, I then returned to my friend's cozy bachelor quarters. Would the Empress really select him? It seemed only a happy dream! Dimitri and Serge were already ensconced, comfortably, in huge easy chairs. They were enjoying the first real leisure since the joint arrest.

Major Trepoff had already deposited with President Mouravieff the varied proofs of the case, and dispatched the locksmith for a crucial examination by the wily dictator, who followed all the minute undercurrents of Russian life with a masterly experience. It was my first hour of relaxation, and a sense of comfort and safety stole over me. The Count, accustomed to quickly dispatch such affairs, would close all up, and receive his Majesty's orders the next day. Police etiquette, capped by the positive order of the Czar, took the case now out of the dreadful Secret Section. It was now carried beyond it, into the Privy Council's final hands; and, we

feared General Ivan Haxo no longer! Trepoff had reported to General Davidoff the orders of the Emperor. The soldierly Commandant was happy to officially note the changed status of the mysterious Hermione. Dimitri, with good judgment, obtained a personal order from Count Tolstoi, embodying the will of the sovereign. And our helpless absentee was fenced around with safeguards! The never-flagging devotion of Durand made her but too happy to share Hermione's retirement in the casemates; and the "secret brotherhood" dropped out of the case. Save for the absence of all communication, our "dangerous charge" was to-day far safer than at any time while playing hide-and-seek with the police. Major Trepoff informed us he had been very guarded in the disclosure of the extent of commutation hoped for; for Haxo might still conspire against her. He had plainly informed the lovely prisoner that deportation as a state prisoner to some Siberian town would be the very lightest form of the final punishment. And what a world of joyous hopes clung to a living future! Trepoff dreamed dreams of love. Hermione sent me messages of a tender gratitude. I knew that through that woman of magic resources, Durand, I would soon receive any new private wishes. And the curtain would yet rise on the past life of my stormy petrel! "Dimitri," said I, "how would you like to take a little Siberian trip this winter? It would, perhaps, bring you near to friends!" He turned pale as I spoke. He was ignorant yet of all the Empress' kind intentions. "Gladly would I go," said he. "By rail, we Russians go a great interior distance now. Then, the sleigh voyages, over good snow, with the teams given to an 'imperial messenger,' are simply delightful. I wouldn't mind it a bit!" he said, affecting a fine carelessness. "The stations are only sixteen to eighteen miles apart, and the telegraph line follows the great main road. There are worse trips in Continental Europe. Once safely over the great Lake Baikal, and then running down the rivers on the smooth ice, the trip becomes a pleasure." "How about the robbers, wolves, prowling assassins, and all the other romantic features?" I queried. "Travelers' tales!"

smiled he. "My dear sir, our officers on the Pacific coast," continued Dimitri, "and their families, often travel both summer and winter from Vladivostock to Petersburg, overland, in preference to the long sweltering sea route, via Suez canal, to Odessa. The Siberian bugaboo is a thing of the past! These stories largely fill the fertile brains of romancers, who know not that a great deal of Siberia is a lovely and liveable country, needing only a superior population and railroads to develop the wonderful natural resources. Wait till our railroad reaches the Pacific! I would not object to one winter away from the heated ball rooms and society round of St. Petersburg." "I am glad you are so enthusiastic," said I, "for you are likely to enjoy this pleasure, and also to have very agreeable company in escorting a fair prisoner," said I, maliciously; for I must be the first to bring him the good news. His eyes opened in astonishment. "What do you mean?" said he, eagerly. I pitied the lover's anxious heart throbs. I told him briefly of the Empress' noble resolve, with regard to the inspection of the condition of the women prisoners, and cautioned him not to betray any eagerness as regarded Hermione, personally, lest General Haxo might craftily circumvent the new arrangements. "General Mouravieff can tell you more. He is to present you to the Empress at once," I said, in conclusion. And Trepoff's face grew radiant. Dimitri sprang to his feet, pressed my hand, nodded to Serge, and was then off like a flash. He grasped the first cloak and turban as he disappeared. He waited not for his own sleigh, but we saw him eagerly hail a passing one. It disappeared in a cloud of flying snow. I well knew his destination was the Mouravieff palace on the Moika. Serge stared at me in blank amazement. He was "in the woods." "What does all this mean?" said he, finally. "It means," I replied, "that fate is sometimes kind. We are all but the puppets of a capricious fortune, Serge! After the whole trouble brought on us all, Dimitri is going to happily undertake the most romantic journey of his life—in the name of the Czar!" Serge's eyes glistened. "I can see that he will have a varied experience, and much re-

sponsibility," said the innocent naval officer, who had eyes now for but one sweet woman in the whole wide world. "I can hardly detect the delightful romance," he skeptically concluded. "Serge, you are as blind as a bat!" I answered. "His life romance is now locked up in those casemates yonder!" I remarked, as I puffed a cloud of smoke, contemptuously, toward my late residence over the river. "I will make it clear to you: He desperately loves Hermione! He will go to Siberia—for her sake!" Serge jumped (wound and all) to his feet. "And she?" he eagerly questioned. He was a picture of astonishment. "My dear boy," I replied, "you will have to ask the fair lady yourself. You have some claims on her, as you came near being murdered in her defense. I have been just long enough in prison to lose any desire to linger underground in St. Petersburg. My little trip, just averted by good luck, to far Siberia, would not be as interesting as this one, even if the Czar requested, or, rather, ordered it. I have seen about enough of Russia! America is good enough for me! I would like to see you married, though! Zastrow!" said I, seriously, "I will make my fiancée a promise, if I ever get safely out of Russia, never to speak again to a strange lady en voyage in my life—if, indeed, I am ever permitted to travel alone again! But I think the Schuylkill banks will chain me to their calm beauties in future! I have thrown away time enough in romantic nonsense!" Serge was absorbed in the construction of a huge cigarette. His eyes were very thoughtful. I told him all, and he was wildly overjoyed. "We must all act with extreme caution," he said. "Trepoff's only plan is to be utterly indifferent to anything but his mission. He can certainly secretly assure the decent comfort of that wonderful woman, and by and by her pardon will open the road to his future happiness, if all goes well," was his command. "Mouravieff always carries his point; and, Vera is irresistible! Many a Russian lady of rank has followed her lover or husband over there when deported. Several of the sweetest women of our land have owed their happy future married life to the accidents of our queerly blinded administration. If Count Moura-

vieff chooses, his brother, the Governor General, can make Hermione's stay in Siberia quite as comfortable as in Paris," he remarked. "Of course, a bit lonely—that's all! At a number of Siberian cities, life is positively enjoyable. At 'Irkutsk,' it is even brilliant. The Paris of Siberia is on Lake Baikal; yet to be the gem of Asian high life. Ah! the magic touch of the railway will change all!" "Do they not oppress the deported people? Do they admit them to share any human enjoyments?" I asked, with interest. "Wait for Dimitri's own disinterested report on his return!" said Serge, with a laugh. "He will be able to enlighten us! That is, if he tells the whole story! Of course, I speak only of the state prisoners. The felons only get what they would in any other land." And the wounded hero was smiling very roguishly. So it was to be! The sentence might be that Trepoff should be led a real captive in love's rosy charms—"in the name of the Czar."

It was late when Major Trepoff returned. Serge and I had this night enjoyed our bachelor dinner in easy comfort. The Major was fortunate enough to share the hospitality of Count Mouravieff's patriarchal table: for we all now believed in rowing hard, while the tide helped us. Over the wine and walnuts, Dimitri had conferred at length with the great noble. In the salon of the Countess the two Komaroff ladies, with their graceful hostess, sounded the praises of the Empress; and a chorus of loving gratitude was raised in her honor. Serge, with a becoming delicacy, agreed with me to leave Trepoff in ignorance of his knowledge of the growing passion for the fair prisoner, who seemed fated to involve every one near her in her destiny. For the real secret of her life was yet to be unveiled! Was she worthy of Trepoff's love? My own idea was that if the bright-eyed falcon found a master the current of her future years would flow happily. Future events, and time alone, could lead up to an oblivion of her saddened cloudy past. Pardon and a clear reinstatement in her social position would only be achieved by the gentle oblivion of months, as well as newer local excitements would be soon chasing her name from the public mind. The hautmonde for-

gets so soon in watching the passing show. "Through night to light" the quest of Hermione's life must be carefully followed out, with its lurking peril and intrigue at every step. The private secretary of Count Mouravieff was already finishing a brief and clear statement of the case. The frightened locksmith's evidence was taken, and he was dismissed, assured of future protection. Trepoff was directed to join the President at the Privy Council room in the morning; and so, our souls were buoyed up by our faith in the kindly old noble's bonhomie. Before the assembly of the Council, Count Mouravieff intended to present to the Confidential Secretary of the Emperor's Private Cabinet, the full report, obtain at once a brief audience, and then personally handle the matter in the open Council. Revision of the sentence concluded, it then only needed the seal to insure the prisoner a positive immunity from all further police attack; for then she was inviolable and invulnerable. The "Secret Section" for once was muzzled. They dared not touch a woman under the special protection of Mouravieff. The question of her future conduct to Siberia was, of course, to be left to the gracious Empress; and the details of arrangement to the skillful hands of the great ladies who sympathized, as all true daughters of Eve do, with the lover and the lady for love's own sweet sake. So much can be done under the rose, in easy-going Russia. The main battle was won at last! It was considered wise by the adroit Madame Mouravieff to conceal from the grizzled diplomatist any especial personal purpose in Hermione's falling into the hands of her gallant escort; for the selection of another official escort might follow any ill-timed interference of others—the revengeful police officials.

These things manage themselves better even in Russia without too much interference; for such details swing into place if the main plan is a good one.

It was a matter of course that under such news the spirits of our little triumvirate rose mightily. Serge, his wound healed, was ready now to assist in the departure of my family; to present himself for duty, and to follow out the most agreeable task of his life. He



had now to go through all the technical and interminable formality which attends a Russian wedding of the higher classes; for this union would weld together permanently Hermione's friends at last! A high noble, an officer, a man near the crown, must begin with his baptismal papers, then gain the imperial consent, and fulfill much Greek church formality, the selection of a "pere and mere d'honneur" for the occasion; official visits to the whole family, and a few more requisites, are also necessary. On our table, a flaming bowl of Vodki punch was prepared in honor of Vera's victory.

We toasted the generous Emperor, that gracious lady his consort, and almost all the Komaroffs and Mouravieff clans, with the loyal Zastrows. It was natural we omitted that great functionary General Ivan Haxo, in this symposium. He, the unbidden guest, was nursing his humiliation afar; but not a moment forgetting to cherish his hatred and revenge. "Better than shooting Polish spies, Serge," said the Major, as he drained his glass to the future bride, the indefatigable Vera. The happiness of Trepoff was decidedly contagious. Serge smiled, and then returned the toast, with a mocking simplicity, as he clinked glasses. "Dimitri," said the duellist-lover, "I am afraid you will have a very tiresome trip. I pity you!" We had forgotten to toast Hermione. The delicacy of the situation prevented the Major from returning this sally with any reference to her name; but a strange look in his eyes told us that his heart was deeply stirred. He was in soul now far away, by her side, in the lonely cell on the Neva. "I suppose you can stand the fatigue, Trepoff," said I, soothingly. He flashed me a glance to limit my teasing him about that famous trip. "I hope so!" said the Major, thoughtfully. So, we were a very joyous party on this happy night. The hour was late before the mantle of sleep wrapped us in dreams, each of his own rosy-clouded future, while the drifting snowflakes fell lightly in the streets outside. Blessed land of dreams! Freedom, hope, light, and life are there, to illumine the devious path of the future before the world-weary children of men!

Stirring betimes were we all the next morning; for I

had only to await the definite action of the council to feel myself free to mingle once more with the social public, and to close up all my long-neglected trust. It was my desire that my neglected Madeleine should, under the gentle guidance of Madame Komaroff and Vera, see something of the glories of the new Muscovite Paris. I had no desire to be unduly prominent now! I felt free to make all my arrangements for departure as soon as the great seal was affixed to Hermione's papers. By general advice of the whole circle of friends, the ladies were to be guardians of Madeleine, as any extensive acquaintance with local society would only continue the general mystery and excitement as to the whole episode, and we wished to assure Hermione's future deliverance by hastening her away from Haxo's sphere of action. Serge (on Cupid's special service) adorned himself for a tête-à-tête breakfast with the lady of his heart. It was but a few moments after our cheerful coffee when Major Trepoff departed for the Winter Palace. His presentation to the Czarina as her chosen knight was to be the crowning event of his social career; and the hand of the gentle Czarina would give him the highest accolade of social rank possible. Her gracious favor was the star of our success. To be honored with the special instructions of the fair Empress placed him at the head of all the gilded youth of the Court. Nodding plume, golden aiguillettes, superb uniform, and a blaze of orders and medals, made Trepoff a gallant martial figure as he strode down the steps. His own beautiful equipage was at the door. He then dashed away through the crowded streets to secure the fate of our mysterious enchantress. I turned my eyes longingly now towards the far frontier. Certain twinges admonished me to escape in all this sunny weather. For clouds might lower again. Happy hours were those awaiting me at the Admiralty Quai. The light was back in Madeleine's eyes: and I was rehabilitated,—the hero of a romantic mystery,—and,—a vaguely hopeful merriment pervaded the once troubled household.

General Michael greeted me with a hearty cordiality, as he took his own departure for the palace. For he was

to be there to support our general interests and, now aroused, to aid in circumventing the machinations of Haxo. Justine and Madame Zastrow were desirous of framing every pleasurable surrounding for my gentle charge, Madeleine. We all looked forward to a happy reunion, over the borders of the great Land of Peter. The whole aspect of Nature seemed to have changed in the sunlight of happiness. A bright winter sun sparkled, too, on the snows in the midday hours. Across the Neva, now spread a sheet of ringing crystal ice stretching to where the great, gray fortress walls loomed in the air. While the jingling Russian bells merrily rang out, and hundreds of sleighs dashed by,—in a council room of the Winter Palace,—the high nobles named as the Privy Council, debated the case of Hermione. Presiding over the trusted few, the wily Mouravieff listened in silence to the general opinion. The routine-wedded council was divided. A number carelessly called for the due execution of the sentence; others indifferently suggested penal transportation to Siberia. Some called for simple deportation. In the hands of these same listless men, lay the task of guarding the safety of the Imperial family. Old custom cut off appeals to the individual generosity of the Czar. For, to them, all severity and grim punishment seemed to be the only pledge of safety for their charges. The other pressing cases disposed of, Count Mouravieff arose, for he had bided his time, and then in his passionless voice, said,—as he indicated a matter of some unusual gravity:

“Gentlemen! I have been specially charged with reading you a rescript of his Majesty the Emperor, in this particular case. I was honored with a call to examine into certain facts and papers, bearing on this involved affair. I was directed also to make summary report on them,—at a special audience granted to me this morning. The methods of the Secret Bureau,—in this case,—are not approved. His Majesty the Emperor personally directs the following:

“I. The proceedings of the court are disapproved.

“II. The death sentence is annulled.

“III. The prisoner Hermione (nationality and true

name unknown) will be deported to Siberia,—as a state prisoner. She will be delivered to the Governor General, at Irkutsk (under the special orders of the Private Bureau of the Emperor). Orders regarding her will be sent to the Governor General, from the Private Bureau;—all other directions in this case will be from that source.

“IV The proceedings and this order will be sealed with the Great Seal and instantly transmitted to General Davidoff, who will simply detain the prisoner, being responsible for her proper treatment as a state prisoner of rank.

“V The papers and private property of the prisoner will all be delivered over to Major Dimitri Trepoff (now on special duty), in the Ministry of the Interior.”

When General Mouravieff finished, a respectful silence ensued. The secretary of the council then gravely wrote out the official review. He attached the order to the proceedings, duly sealed the whole series,—and then presented them to Count Mouravieff, for his official signature. This was instantly appended. The papers handed to Count Tolstoi, with a remark which at once brought the waiting Major Trepoff before the council.

“You will deliver these to General Davidoff and report later to me,” said Count Tolstoi. The silent Major bowed and withdrew. The very name of the suspect was forgotten before the counsellors had time to yearn for the coming déjeuner. A single life counts for so little! A few moments more broke up the council. The ex-Premier quickly joined the anxious Major in the ante-room.

The Empress’ Chamberlains now rapidly reported that the Czarina would receive Count Mouravieff. Hardly time was left for the young officer to congratulate the veteran chief on his official victory, when both had kissed the fair white hand of the lady of ninety millions of adoring subjects. There was but one gentle voice needed now to insure the rescue of Hermione from ignominy and shame, for Death had fled away, baffled, on dusky wings! Beautiful and beaming was the Empress, in her special audience room, where her maids of honor waited for the imperial nod. And, there were sparkling, furtive smiles

showered upon the young patrician whom a Czarina trusted. Major Trepoff was received, with an especial condescension. Already favorably known, his special selection as a Knight in her Majesty's own service, had made him a fairy prince of all possible future glories to the Ladies of the Day. The sun of Imperial favor sparkled back in their approving eyes. And, yet the pale-faced Trepoff was trembling only for the lonely woman in her cell. Count Mouravieff formally presented the young officer, and then reported the action of the council. The Empress' face brightened up,—for the way was clear! The Czarina said, as she fixed her dark eyes on the young officer:

"The Emperor has been pleased to grant my request that an inspection be made of the condition and surroundings of the women state prisoners in Siberia,—and the general convict classes. He has graciously allowed me to name you,—Major Trepoff,—for this special inspection, which is made on my own suggestion alone!"

Dimitri bowed low in silent thanks. He could hardly realize the possibilities now to shield and guard the helpless one on the Neva!

"You may arrange your affairs. You will receive special instructions from the Private Imperial Bureau. I desire you to most fully confer with Count Mouravieff. You will receive from him personal letters and every possible kindly introduction to his brother, the Governor General, at Irkutsk. Count Tolstoi will also be ordered to give you an Imperial Passport, especially placing every facility at your disposal. You are now to visit the entire Siberian region, using your own judgment as to all details. Orders sent to you will be from the Private Bureau of the Emperor alone. You will be also authorized to use the telegraph, directly, to the Imperial Secretary." The Imperial Consort paused, and then said, impressively:

"I repose every confidence in your kindness and zeal. You will understand, Major, that your report is intended for me, personally. I wish to know the real situation of the deported women of supposed good character!" Major Trepoff knelt and then gratefully kissed the Imperial

lady's hand, murmuring his thanks;—for he dared not show the joy mirrored in his tell-tale face now!

“Count Mouravieff, I shall send for you later and confer personally, on this important subject,” continued the Czarina. It was the last guarantee of Hermione's future safety! The old nobleman bowed his grateful acknowledgments.

“I desire Major Trepoff to conduct this unfortunate lady prisoner, at once, to Irkutsk, where the Governor General can take charge of her till further pleasure. I shall see that her case receives a special consideration. If she can be proved only imprudent, perhaps, pardon may come later!”

Both gentlemen took their leave, and very kindly were the eyes of the gentle Empress as the young Major departed, followed now by a rattling series of electric glances from the bright-eyed ladies of the circle. So dashing a young paladin did not come every day, even within the reach of their sunny smiles.

With affectionate solicitude, Trepoff conducted the well-pleased Mouravieff to his sleigh. Eager to be away to the fortress, the warmth of his adieu caused the old hero to wonder, as he gathered the furs around his yet stately form. The old man's eyes were dreamy, as he followed the already disappearing Major, who was off like an arrow.

“Young blood!—well! Life's romance comes but once, after all,” thought the veteran, as it dawned on his mind that a little more than official solicitude carried Dimitri like a wild huntsman so rapidly away to the citadel. In his own gay youth, when chasing the chivalric children of Schamyl, through the glorious defiles of the Caucasus,—no man was fonder of the deep, tender gleams of dark Circassian eyes than Nicolas Mouravieff. Love and war go hand in hand. Certain twinges of old memories reminded the great man also of proud, witty, blue-eyed Austrian belles; of Italian beauties, and charming French ladies: inimitable in their native graces. Diplomacy had led him into many of these little romances of the old time. It was undoubted the path of his life had not been all thorns;—for the old man

smiled and sighed,—as he thought over the unnecessary good actions, performed by him, in this later episode; and so, he contented himself philosophically with seeing a younger hero reap the reward. A Richelieu in finesse,—he was not altogether displeased to see how all the ladies of his family had led him in his old age into a sort of “Hoodman Blind” game. For he well knew there was an undercurrent of Love sweeping along somewhere near him! Proud of his Countess, fond of Trepoff, admiring the inimitable Komaroff ladies,—the old chief was also not averse to having taught General Haxo that his old hand could yet show the grasp of steel in the velvet glove! So, in the greatest contentment, he mounted the staircase of the Moika mansion, to be most tenderly cross-questioned at once by his bevy of fair conspirators. While the flying steeds were bearing Dimitri Trepoff away to the fortress, at the window of her casemate, gazing steadily out, stood Hermione de Vries. Buoyed up by her own brave soul,—her agony of these eventful days was shown only in the calm, set resolution of that noble face. For the relief of Death’s oblivion seemed near. All depended now on the friends whose power was limited to lessening the dread sentence. And, what dreary future lay before her? The woman of the world was lost in the martyr now!

Leaning on her rounded arm, the thought of a lonely future in Siberia weighed heavily upon her heart. Better death than to be sent where every petty official could heap upon her their nameless indignities in the voiceless oblivion of that far off land. There, the great rivers spring from the Baikal ranges and wander away, flowing from the real roof of the Asian world to the frozen north,—to the far, blue Pacific, and on down through mystic China to the Yellow Sea! A land of a chilling silence! The land of dead Hopes!—of Death itself!

Durand, quiet and watchful, gazed on her great-souled mistress. But, her steadfast soul had never flinched! She forgot her own daily dangers in encouraging the woman she had learned to love. A sound of shuffling feet, a quick, energetic, manly tread following, clanging doors opened, and Hermione’s eyes, like dancing stars upon

the darkness of the lonely sea, met the eager glance of Dimitri as he sprang into the room. It was a tale told without words! The old warder motioned to Durand, who followed him out. The iron doors then closed upon the lady and her lover. It was the strangest place for the tryst of an eternal love! She clasped his hands in hers,—as he kissed them in silence. There was a quivering of love's own regret in her low voice as she spoke:

"You bring me my fate, Dimitri! It is over at last!" she steadily said;—for, she could not read the secret hidden in the happiness which shone out on the soldier's face.

"I bring you your life, darling!" he said, as she sank trembling into a chair. His supporting arms were round her and his kisses raining on the white, helpless hands warmed the gentle current of her blood. In a few moments, she opened her eyes! Her kneeling lover was eager now to tell the whole story of the final disposition of her fate by the Imperial Rulers.

"Sit beside me here! Tell me all! I can bear it now!" was the unknown goddess' order to her faithful knight. Alas! it is rare that those gloomy walls ever hear a recital of such blessed promise,—of softened penalty,—of life saved from the rack,—or the degrading touch of the executioner! As the story progressed, Hermione's sparkling eye and heaving bosom told of the reflux tide of hope and aspiration! The splendid eyes were veiled with tears of womanly gratitude, as the triumphant Major then detailed the generous devotion of the ladies, the wise counsels of Count Mouravieff, and the carefully-extended personal clemency of the gentle Czarina. Now! Hermione knew all! Her lover looked at his falcon-eyed prisoner with passionate eagerness. Her eyes were downcast and dreamy, for he had clasped her trembling hands in his. It was only a change from one jailer to another! The demand came very soon! Made imperious by a love passing all bounds of prudence, Trepoff said:

"Hermione!—your life is safe now! I can answer for your journey to the distant land, where none will know,—where nothing can part us! I ask now a life for a life! Be mine!—you must be mine forever!"



The fair unknown smiled at the eagerness, which proved how much of the headlong boy was yet merged in the man before her.

"Your words are wild, Major! On the threshold of the scaffold, with the chill of prison walls still clinging to me, you ask me to burden your life with mine! It is madness! Dismiss the thought," said Hermione. "You, an Empress' favorite! I, a condemned prisoner!"

"I will never cease to claim you at the hands of Fate while I have breath, my own beautiful darling!" cried the soldier, as he knelt beside her, covering her trembling hands with his burning kisses. And, that mighty god of men, Love, was lord of all in that dreary prison cell!

"You can not!—you shall not!" replied the agitated woman. "Think of all your friends, of your haughty family, your future career, your bounden duty to the Empress! No!—it must not be! It would be your ruin!"

"Do you believe that I love you?" said Trepoff,—and then his burning eyes sought hers in vain. He would have his answer;—and, she feared to deny the truth! Downcast now were the fluttering eyelids,—her white hands lay idle on her lap,—her eyes told the story in the sweet surrender of her very soul to him! Silence reigned, only broken by the echoes of the harsh commands of the busy officers, drilling the guards below in the prison yard!

"Can you answer me, darling?" the lover persisted. "I will guard you with my last drop of blood!"—for, he would fain hear it from her lips. Hermione rose like a queen; she led him up to the grated window.

"Major Trepoff!" she said, her bosom panting, "do you see that wild bird sailing over the Neva?" He watched the graceful flight of the gray gull swiftly cleaving the wintry air. In silence, he bowed his head.

"Meet me when I am as free as that bird!—in any land on earth!—in other times!—and, I will answer your question with rapture. You speak now only to a broken-hearted woman,—a child of misery,—the very sport of Fortune! Is it fair to press me now?" She threw up

her head, with the old pride, and then fixed eyes on him which blazed with the fire of eager inquiry!

"Listen, Hermione," said he, gently, as he led her to a seat. "I have sworn to you that I love you. I will keep faithful watch and ward over you! You shall not know sorrow or shame while Dimitri Trepoff lives! In far-away Siberia, I can place you as a simply deported person, where you will have all the respect which is due to your real station in life. I have powerful friends behind me. In a few months, you may be pardoned! In a fortnight we will leave here together. Our three families here will agitate your pardon. I only ask you to promise that I may know now that I have the right to win your hand, and live the rest of my days in your love! Answer me! I will not press you farther! Let me only look towards the future, and see you waiting there for me as my wife! My poor darling!" He could say no more, for his heart was throbbing in the exquisite pain of Love! There were happy tears in her eyes as she answered, brokenly:

"Dimitri, I know that you love me! You have toiled to save me from the worst of horrors! I would have given to you my latest sigh! I will not say now I love you! You know nothing of my past! You can not read my history on this troubled face!"—she paused.

"My poor darling," said the officer, soberly, "I ask you not now to tell me the whole sad story!—my Hermione! I will be content with one assurance from your own lips! Is there any reason why you would not be mine, if you were a free woman, and in happier days?" There was a ring in her voice now of true womanly pride:

"I would not decline the honor of your alliance, were I free, on any grounds which touched my own life! I am worthy to say, if I could,—if I dared,—'Dimitri, I love you with my whole heart and soul!' I will not drag you down! I will not ruin your name, or place you under the ban of the good Czarina's distrust! You are in the sunshine of Fortune now!"

"But, if you are pardoned?" he eagerly demanded.

"My friend," said she, slowly. "It is a weary journey to the far-off land where I may end my days! No, my

generous friend! I will accept your guidance, guardianship, counsel and every protection from you. Then, when you have placed me there,—where quiet forgetfulness will wrap my sad past,—you will return,—you will marry some bright girl,—and forget poor Hermione!” Her voice ended in a sob,—and her queenly face was now buried in her hands.

“Never! I swear by the God who made me! Hermione! I will follow you, over land and sea, to some place where, in freedom and in happy hours, you can answer my question! You shall be mine! I will wait for your answer!” was the soldier’s firm reply, “to my dying day!” He would not be denied!

“Then, listen,” said his lovely charge. “I owe my life to Walter Grahame, who has risked everything for me on mere faith. His liberty, his peace of mind, his future has been endangered by his generous aid, and my foolish quest,—and his steadfast adherence to me. He has a kind and lovely sister,—another who is allied to your house:—I will not answer you now. I will promise this: They will leave soon; I will now permit him, before we go, to read my story,—which he has under seal. He can tell my story to his sister Justine,—to Madame Komaroff,—and that lovely angel Vera, who will soon marry your cousin Serge. It is due to those ladies to know at last who I am. On your return, they can tell you all! You can, then, work whole-heartedly for me. If you achieve my pardon, I will answer you! But, I will not, even by a promise, link your fate to mine while the prison taint clings to me. I was born free!”—her eyes flashed! The soldier mused in silence.

“And, I may ask no more?” he finally pleaded.

“Dimitri, I would die for you, but I can not go farther now! The fate of others might yet depend on mine;—I will not claim your young life till I know it will not be your ruin, to love the wanderer whom you have saved from the last heart-break to a woman. Shame before Death!” Her voice was as low and sweet as a final good-bye to Hope. It was the self-sacrifice of a loving woman, and, Trepoff saw through the tender subterfuge.

“Hermione, my own only love!” said Trepoff, “I shall

see you daily,—now,—to arrange all for your departure. I will not press this in an unmanly way, when you are not free! I shall make every plan before you go, as if you had answered me. I know that you must yet suffer long in exile,—but, thank God! even that will be lighter than if you were a felon prisoner. You will be only kept to the limits of the city which you are sent to. Mouravieff's powerful arm will be spread out over you. The Komaroff ladies will watch all here, and dear old Serge will aid, too! I must go now, my own poor darling,—but, to-morrow I will be with you. I have to dispose of all your effects as you wish. I have freedom to do all that is proper. You may have any free woman to go with you whom you may wish to take. I will furnish anything required. Under the laws, your correspondence, alone, will be supervised. You can have everything you need. General Mouravieff, at Irkutsk, will see that you are well provided always." This thoughtful, prescient kindness touched Hermione, as her lover rose to go, and report in detail to the General. She rose, fixing her sweet eyes on him.

"Major Trepoff," said she, softly, "I thank you for the delicate foresight of all your provision for me. I will take my good Durand, who will not fear to share my fate. My whole affairs here I will place in your hands. I wish Walter Grahame to know all. He is a lawyer. I will give you written directions as to everything. Can I not see him?" she questioned; "for I have much, much to trust to his honor and experience!" Trepoff pondered.

"Yes!—on an order from Count Tolstoi, at General Mouravieff's request. It might be possible, but we must not arouse General Haxo."

"I thank you," said the lady. "Go now, beloved friend, and bear to the gracious Empress the blessings of a woman who calls Heaven's choicest gifts down on her queenly head. To Count Mouravieff, to all the ladies, and the gentlemen of your family,—I send my grateful thanks. I must see Walter Grahame, whose devotion has saved me in these awful days. He has put even his good name in my hands! I regret, I deplore, all the

trouble I have brought you." Her eyes were dreamy, and her hands lay helplessly before her! She was fighting against Love!

"It has brought you to me, Hermione!" said Trepoff, with an unspoken prayer in his voice, as he kissed her delicate hands. She was so sweet, so tenderly prophetic in her gentle attempts at a denial of what was shining in her happy eyes! The love that reigned in her heaving bosom!

"Not yet, Dimitri," said she; "a long quest is before you. I will not ruin you. If I am free,"—and her voice then faltered, as she softly added, as he sprang to her side—"I will then say to you, 'Dimitri! I love you!'"

She did not resist now, as his arms drew her to his breast. With her eyes shining tenderly, she whispered, "Go now, and leave me! I will give you one assurance, and the very last! Before you go,—the three dear ladies who will know my story may tell you, if you ask, that I am worthy to be your wife,—but, only when free! When you return, they can tell you all my story;—for then the seal of silence will be broken for you, only,—only you. If ever I meet you, after you know all, my answer will be, this"—she raised her face to his! Dimitri Trepoff knew that,—far away,—in the dim future, that love would be his, which pride and a prison restraint now locked in her steadfast breast! For, only on equal terms, would the bright Falcon mate!

One last embrace,—a clang of the door,—her lover was gone! The lady, in the arms of her faithful guardian Durand, sighed her thanks to the God of Mercy, who had lifted the dread shadow from that prison door! And, though behind bars, an angel, the spirit of Love, stood beside her, whispering, "Wait! wait!"

Serge eyed Major Trepoff very keenly when he returned. He was grave and silent. The man who had shared all Hermione's sorrows saw in the Major's eyes the shining promise of his faith,—his love,—and that he would achieve yet her pardon. In the name of the Czar!

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE STAR OF POLAND — WEDDING BELLS — OFF TO SIBERIA — NEMESIS.

In the now closing scenes of my eventful stay on the Neva, much was yet before me to accomplish. When another day gave us its semi-illumination, all was activity at Trepoff's house. Dimitri had to attend to his affairs, outfit and instructions. He must take official leave of the Grand Duke. There were also conferences with Mouravieff, his own final orders from the Empress, and all his arrangements for a long six months' frontier tour. In addition, the personal comfort of Hermione was a side study of engrossing attention to the happy man, who hugged his hopes to his silent breast. She must be secretly outfitted and made ready. Serge was pleading to satisfy the great desire of his lover's heart. He ardently wished to marry Princess Vera before our departure; and a "sine qua non" of the ceremony was that Dimitri Trepoff should be his best man. Count Mouravieff was to be the Père d'Honneur, and Madame Zastrow would act as Mère d'Honneur on behalf of her young kinsman. All this gentle social diplomacy necessitated the immediate visit to St. Petersburg of Governor General Komaroff.

Dimitri Trepoff's task was a serious one; for he feared Haxo's prying eyes. Serge had rather flattered himself that the imperious little Princess Vera would gain the victory for him, and, he was right! His labors were light;—fortunate man! To me was allotted by Fate, as an old traveler, the usual duty to "pack and move on;" and I had at last attained all the objects of my visit! Loud calls on the heart telephone from Philadelphia were ringing me up! Therefore, I repaired at once to Count Mouravieff, who obtained for me himself a special "permission de séjour." My passports were all ready visad for departure, but I wished to see the coming wedding. Madeleine and her guardian Justine were now en-

joying the quaint sights of a grand northern capital in its mad winter whirl. My daily visit and breakfast with the family was to me a reward for the enforced absence, while enjoying the Czar's "military hospitality."

As soon as my permit was handed to me, I drove to the American Legation. My luke-warm friend, the Secretary, was only too eager now to extend all the official civilities. I coldly thanked him, and then, made my farewell as brief as his courtesies had been stinted. An intelligent American may safely discard many of our foreign representatives, and always find a warmer welcome and a more intelligent help from strangers. The splendid results of a patch-work political foreign representation are incompetence and neglect. I possessed myself of Hermione's sealed packet, and all my own letters, and papers. They were very strangely returned to me! I telegraphed at once to all my correspondents to send all new matter "Poste Restante,—Vienna." I considered all, and had decided to go on by Moscow and Warsaw to Vienna. I did not care to stop over at Wilna, or to repass the frontier at Eydtkuhnen. I would thus be enabled to see Poland, and the antique capital of Russia—Moscow!

Driving to Trepoff's, I made myself comfortable. Following the brief directions from Hermione, sent me by the Major, I opened and read the long-withheld story of the wanderer's life. I found a manuscript, and with it the note penned by the "bright-eyed unknown," when momentary death stared her in the face. In her clear hand, these words greeted me:

"In Prison.

"My one unselfish Friend:

"God alone knows when this will meet your eye. I thank you for the devotion which you have shown to me. I will never forget it,—in this world or the next. Inclosed, is a sealed letter with directions, and my will: of which I have made you and Major Trepoff executors, with my banker added. Please have the signature certified here, by the bank notary. You are to follow the directions in the letter and to impart my poor life romance

to no one, except as therein stated. If I should live, you will have further directions.

"May every blessing rest on you and yours.

"Yours in life and death,

"Hermione de Vries,

"Countess Arline Oborska,

"once Arline Lazienska."

The letter dropped from my hands. I knew the Oborskis, and Lazieniskis, as two of the very oldest families of Poland. Even the remnant of their great estates made them distinguished in the society of Vienna and Paris. Placing aside the will and sealed papers, I read the story of my "Beautiful Unknown."

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"I am Arline Oborska of Poland. My father was Count Ladislas Lazieniski. Our estates are near Cracow. I was a little child when the last wild insurrection of 1865 gave poor Poland over to fire and sword. My mother, Natalie Sadowska, was one of the most spirited and beautiful of our Polish ladies. It is from her I inherit those poor personal attractions, which caused my friends to call me, in happier days, 'The Star of Poland.' Always in the van of patriotic plans, my father foresaw the result of the despairing effort to throw off the Russian yoke. Our estates were vast, even after repeated spoliation: my merry childhood was passed in the lovely home of my family. In no part of the world have I found the happiness which reigned in that dear old castle. While I played in the beautiful gardens, or watched my lovely and devoted mother in her home, delighting all our circle, my father was busied with his trusted friends in preparing for the struggle to come;—1848 had blotted out one generation of gallant Poles;—in 1863 the older patriots vainly tried to save the remnants of our people from a bloody and useless attempt to conquer the Russian tyrant. My two spirited brothers were cadets at the Polish school in Warsaw. They were



ardent patriots,—alas! doomed by their spirit and loyalty to die for poor Poland! I am the only survivor of our branch of the old family. Every true Pole is a born conspirator:—only those who have sold themselves to Russia are quiescent. The conspirator is a madman, for Russia will never relax her iron hand. The traitor and spy, who is on the secret list of the Russian government, is a slave. My gallant father was an ardent patriot, but his keen intellect told him how unequal was the struggle. With great foresight, he placed some of our funds, derived from the sale of property (cautiously conducted), in other lands, to provide for such of his family as might survive the coming revolution. Stern, martial and devoted,—he kept this knowledge from my adored mother. When the war storm burst upon us, he had provided a place of safety in France for my mother and myself. Every effort was made to give me all training suitable to my rank. My growing delight in life was only checked by the sad day when my dear father rode out of the castle gate (surrounded by his volunteers), the fluttering silk banner at their head, bearing the old defiant motto: ‘*To Polskie.*’ My weeping mother clasped me to her breast. I only saw her after that,—in black robes. Alas! It was prophetic! Ladislav Lazienki died at the head of his men in one of our useless victories,—the bravest of the brave! I mingled my childish tears with my widowed mother’s sobbing. When the cloud of Cossacks neared us, we all prepared for departure to our haven in France. There, old friends (unable to fight) awaited us. The last day in my old home, I can never forget. My two brothers, in cadet uniform, took leave of our mother. I childishly admired the trappings of the brave lads’ uniforms. They kissed their ‘little sister’ a last ‘good-bye.’ As our carriage rolled away under the escort of a few old servants I sobbed bitterly. Those dear boys soon lay dead, in the ‘*Silent Battery*,’—where grim Mouravieff stormed the bloody outworks, where a division had been held a whole day at Warsaw, and stormed it, to find the boy defenders lying dead around their guns. I next remember Paris,—where my girlhood was passed. There I was carefully reared by my saddened, delicate mother.

Poland became to me a dream; my father's and brothers' names and faces soon were only sacred memories. In later years,—after the amnesty,—we two lonely women returned to the old home. There were no men of our race left. My mother temporarily enjoyed peace in the scene of her early happiness. Reared in a home made desolate by Russian warfare, I became a dreamy patriot. It was natural that in the flower of my beauty I loved Adam Oborski, who had been my brothers' classmate and fellow soldier. His gallantry, his devotion to the memory of my dead relatives charmed me. Young, brave and accomplished was he. His only rival was Alexis Radzivil, the scoundrel who died by Serge Zastrow's hand. Radzivil was powerful. I despised his association with the Russian officers. I learned this aversion from my faithful mother, who never descended into the hall when the passing Russian officers were quartered on us. Radzivil swore revenge on me; he threatened to repay Adam Oborski! Our married life was very brief. I was still in a dream of young love when, at a public occasion, near our home, Radzivil grossly insulted my husband. A duel with pistols followed,—in which the foul spy fired long before the word! He basely murdered Count Oborski! This sorrow nearly crazed me. It soon left me alone in the world. My dear and sainted mother sleeps in the old chapel of our home. Government espionage and persecution followed. I traveled abroad for years. My only relative was old Count Branicki,—an uncle who had passed some peaceful years in England. With his books and science, he strove to forget his prostrate country's wrongs. I remained some time with him. I thus gained the knowledge of the English language which I have. Back to Paris my weary wanderings took me; and, tiring of society, I was entrapped and became a member of an order I will not name. My wealth and rank made me useful and above suspicion. My father had been a member of the 'International.' Being unused to intrigue, I was drawn into a fearful compact. Too soon did I find out the utter uselessness of the general movement. Bitterly did I regret my fatal rashness. My money only was what was vitally needed.

I soon tired of a scheme which aims to destroy all and build up nothing. There are inner ambitious minds who draw power, revenue and profit from the devotion of the blinded ones. High, vain passions are fed in the mysterious, gloomy grandeur of the upper socialist ranks. Bakounin, Karl Marx, La Salle, and others have found counter-plot and hostile intrigues in their embittered councils. Devoted and romantic women, aspiring and unbalanced youths, abandon themselves to hideous fates,—to keep up an agitation which is a standing indiscriminate attack on civilization. The absolute uselessness of secret society reform is shown in the final breakdown of all the social and family relations and the depravation of perpetually excited intellects. No single positive element of goodness enters into the highest creeds of pure socialism. This is, simply, perpetual revolution,—and, unproductive anarchy. My views of its uselessness became known. It was to perhaps silence my tongue (in a death for the cause),—(while keeping my large funds),—that I was selected to return to Russia. I was only to deliver certain papers,—when no ordinary traveler could hope to succeed. I did not know that Alexis Radzivill had followed closely my social career. His unsatiated passion made him still dog my fated steps. It was to be my one dangerous quest. Here I am!—a helpless prisoner! On being brought to bay here, Fate threw me across your path and,—you know the rest. I feared that my personality could not remain a secret! The generous hospitality of your friends forced me into scenes which I would otherwise have avoided. Even in high place, I was safe until Radzivill recognized me,—though we had not met for years. The revenge which caused him to harass my mother, and pursue me, was heightened by the scorn with which all honorable men regarded him after the murder of Count Oborski! He was not altogether sure of my identity even when he sought to force his way on my path, at the opera,—for I had changed my golden hair to a dark color before leaving for Russia. He was thus baffled, and a fortunate death sealed his lips! He evidently desired to get me in his own power once more! He did not give General

Haxo my real name. That was reserved for his own dark future purposes. The General would surely have used it against me on the trial. I am now on the threshold, perhaps, of my grave. You will find I have not forgotten your kindness. To the heroic Serge, I give the never-failing gratitude due the man who avenged my murdered husband. Major Trepoff knows my sense of his manly devotion. To you, dear friend and brother, I can only say, I now make you the depositary of my secrets, and charge you with some future labors. Should death befall me, all your circle will know how far patriotism may lead a lonely woman into strange paths. I see how my family sorrows have made me the tool of dark master-minds. As I have drawn a desperate lot once, should I live, or chance to escape, in my far-off land, I can then live in silence. My vows are now only those of silence. I deprecate assassination in any form,—and, never consented to it. Further revolution is useless in my beloved land, and all my feeble efforts are all in vain. To Poland, I give my latest sigh and pray to God above there will be no more bloodshed. Russia must hold Poland, or lose the gates to its fairest lands! I can not blame that policy of stern necessity, which now makes our national name, only a memory of happier days!

“Dear and beloved friend, may you think kindly of me, if my name becomes a memory, and beyond what I have told you, no woman has been truer to herself than the one looking now out of prison windows, who signs herself—Yours in life and death,

“Arline Oborska.”

This, then, was the life story of Hermione! Her manuscript lay before me unheeded. I watched the blue smoke wreaths float away from my cigar, in dreamily thinking all her strange career over. The old story;—a young, ardent and lonely woman foolishly lured into the councils of a secret order, which flattered her and coldly absorbed her welcome funds to further its own dark designs! They played coldly upon her heart strings. Patriotism could not give way in her nature to assassination! Hermione’s clear intellect was too subtle for the

knaves who would continually hoodwink her! She had seen the Veiled Prophet of Nihilism in all its hideous monstrosity, and she would not be Mokanna's bride! She had a country,—and they had none! I pitied the gentle dupe. I felt but one pathway led out of all this. Hermione must be rescued, in time, from Russian severity. She must be placed far beyond the immediate reach of any dangerous nihilistic orders. America must be her final abiding place,—if she should ever gain her freedom;—for there, the rose of her life would bloom again! Securing all the papers, I awaited my friend Trepoff's return. Serge was still absent. I was dreaming of the story of the old wrongs of Poland,—of its bitter fate as a doomed nation,—when Dimitri entered. Briefly he recounted his interview with the lady. When he had finished, he said:

"Grahame, I have a permit from Count Tolstoi for you, as a lawyer, to see Hermione! Go to-morrow and find out all she wishes! Then, you and I can make every final arrangement. I would work for her pardon now, but I fear General Haxo's continued wrath. He is capable of anything. While I do not fear him personally, I will not draw his later vengeance down on Hermione." He regarded me with anxiety, and handed me a brief note from our lovely captive. I tore it open. She authorized me now to impart her story to the three ladies,—and then begged to see me at once, if I could succeed in gaining that grace.

"Trepoff," said I, gravely, "I have read that woman's life. She is right! You must carefully conceal your feelings for her, or it will ruin you both. Be always on your guard! Make no further attempt to agitate her case now! It would only expose you to distrust! But stay with her to the very last! Convey her safely to Governor General Mouravieff at Irkutsk! Leave this town with her as soon as you can! I will watch over her! We all can work for her freedom. She is worthy of you, Dimitri!"—I laid my hand on his shoulder. He sprang up, and cried:

"I will guard her with my life! And you know her story?"—his eyes were sparkling.

"I do. She must be saved," was my response. "Trust her,—trust me,—and trust to Father Time! You will be wise and successful, only,—if you follow her wishes."

Our colloquy was broken by the return of the jubilant Serge, who had in his hand a telegram from General Komaroff. He would arrive in two days, from Warsaw, and he gracefully consented to an immediate wedding. The three ladies, at the Moika, were all in happy activity. Count Mouravieff had charged himself with all friendly matters,—desiring to relieve Trepoff, who would simply be the best man at the nuptials. His injunction to Serge was to ignore the duel, and make no complaint. Thus acting, he would avoid irritating the sufficiently humbled Haxo. Serge had obtained a leave of two months. My party would follow the happy couple down to Warsaw;—they would prevent any police trouble for me. The pathway was now clear at last. No three happier men were within the lines of the Winter City than ourselves;—for, I saw a clear road back to Philadelphia, and my record was now a proud and manly one.

I hastened to the Admiralty Quai, spending my day in closing up all my business matters. I arranged, with the help of my local counsellor,—a good Russian lawyer,—the final plan of carrying on the affairs of my clients in the land of Penn.

I charged my own gentle Madeleine with the instant duty of making an appointment for a conference for the evening. I arranged this so that with the two Komaroff ladies, on the Moika, my own tender and forgiving sister would now know the whole story of our beautiful wanderer.

Major Trepoff, now all-powerful, obtained the return of all Hermione's valuables. He was busied in removing all her entire property to his residence, so that now only the memory of her graceful presence hung over the old family home, from whence she had been taken as a prisoner, in the name of the Czar. There was not a sign of hostility from the humbled Haxo! General Zastrow appreciated the delicacy of all these arrangements, which would leave his household untouched by any future scandal. Her influence seemed to linger;—we could find no

other topic but her affairs, save our impending departure and the wedding of Vera. This last was to be celebrated at the Church of the Chevalier Gardes Regiment. It would occur as soon as the inner circle of the nobility could be summoned,—after General Komaroff's arrival.

I dispatched word by Major Trepoff that I would be at the prison on the morrow. I asked Hermione to prepare all her wishes. The first happy dinner since our visit from the "Secret Section" harpies, was at last over! And I was on the eve of a welcomed departure! I felt my heart bounding within me. I drove with Madeleine to the Moika. We were welcomed by the ladies, who were eager to know who the Waif of Fortune really was, for whom we all had labored with such unanimity.

I thought, as we sped along over the sparkling snows, that Countess Mouravieff had a sacred right also to know this history. I knew that Serge would know all from Trepoff,—in time. The powerful interest of the Mouravieffs could only be exerted through the Countess, without publicly complicating the ex-Dictator. And,—Haxo must be foiled and muzzled as long as Hermione was a prisoner. So, the four ladies listened, as I read, deliberately, the sad story! Happy Vera's eyes were very tender when I ceased! I felt Madeleine's hand press mine, in sympathy, and mute acknowledgment of a loving forgiveness. Princess Komaroff, with flashing eyes, cried:

"It is a curse of Fate that Russia must obliterate the gallant old Polish families! No wonder every Pole hates the Russian,—who has so cruelly drowned the children in their father's blood. But, it is the inexorable mandate of Fate!" Countess Mouravieff was very grave! An ambadress herself for years,—she knew how the pressure of the strong crushes out all humanity from international policy! A very Russian of the Russians,—the able lady saw that the drawn sword must always guard the gates of Russia!—and, Poland must be crushed, to make Russia invulnerable!

"My dear sir!" she slowly said, "I will give you a letter for the Countess Oborska. I also desire you to ask Major Trepoff to be good enough to see me at once,

alone. I shall now do all that I can for this unfortunate lady. I beg you to urge her to send me her simple word of honor that her future connection with the 'order' will be confined to assuring her own safety. She must quit them forever, for, she would be known now to every Russian agent in the world. We have them, secret and open, everywhere!" There was a slight smile on her delicate lips as she concluded. I understood that she would disarm the bright Falcon forever. It was only right! While I assured her of the execution of her wishes, the other ladies were preparing to write to Hermione, the impulsive Vera being, as usual, far in the lead.

When we regained the Admiralty Quai, late that night, I was the possessor of the tender sympathies of the ladies, expressed in their own words. Vera was reminded by me, that only her wedding would delay my departure.

"There will be no undue delay," she smiled; "for Serge is simply unbearable!" Rosy blushes were on the cheeks of the bright little Princess, who protested that only a regard for Serge's lifelong friendship for Trepoff could alone make her consent to such haste. For the immediate departure of Hermione was the keynote of our whole plans. Her happy heart was filled with triumph and anticipation of the coming years as Serge's wife! It was one of the golden marriages,—a union of kindred souls!

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Once more I entered the frowning arch of the gray fortress. The gallant Brigade Major hospitably received me: he insisted that when my business was concluded I should accept the hospitality of his quarters. This I cheerfully promised. I was soon walking down the stone corridor with the old warder, joyously gazing at a hundred-rouble bill, which had somehow found its way into his hand. The door was opened. I waited till Madame Durand appeared. The devoted woman was in raptures over our success. I entered the casemate and sprang down the well-remembered corridor to the open door. Hermione advanced; her lustrous eyes beaming with the warmest feelings of a grateful heart;—and I



could see the springing dawn of Hope in her flashing eyes!

"At last! my friend!" said she, shyly, motioning me to a seat. I noted the strangely-restrained softness of her manner. The soaring Falcon had found a master!—and her plumage was smoothed by the hand of Love! In kissing her fair hands and briefly giving her the general report of our circle,—I soon found time to hand her the letters of the ladies. I watched her bosom rise and fall, as she turned her glances on me, in a new joy! When she had finished their perusal, glittering tears of thankful happiness were clinging like diamonds on her lashes.

"I will send answers to these dear, noble friends, whose words you have brought, by Major Trepoff, to-morrow! I would send them my whole heart, if I could! I have learned to know the Russian heart, the fire under the snow!"

"Is it yours to send now, Countess Arline?" said I. She started at my address,—and then, suddenly dropped her eyes.

"You know my whole story now!" I bowed my head.

"What has Dimitri told you?" said she, with a smile which was radiant. I referred, generally, to his disclosure.

"You shall know all!" cried Hermione, as she told me of her love in a freedom which even the anxious lover did not yet dare to hope for.

"I will not weigh him down until he has finished his quest for the noble Empress! Other suffering women are languishing now in that far land. I shall see them! I shall be one of them! I will not interrupt their possible relief. But when all is over, I will (if I live to be free) testify to Dimitri Trepoff what a woman's love can be for him." And all the promise of the future was thrilling in her tender eyes. I approved her quiet fortitude, as the whole circle might yet be involved. I reminded her of General Haxo's sleepless hate;—for we were watching him daily. Spy for spy!

"I know all," said she. "Now, listen!"—in her old imperious way—"I know that Serge and Vera will marry soon,—that you will leave Russia with them. Give to

them all my love and devotion. Vera will not forget me! I will write your noble sisters, and all the circle. I have here a letter from Countess Mouravieff, which tells me who is to be my secret friend at Irkutsk. I feel safe now!"—she paused,—I could well guess who that friend was! A woman's hand would save her, for women rule Russia from the frozen sea to the vine-clad Crimea,—from Eydtkuhnen to Vladivostock, on the far blue Pacific! It is the woman's kingdom! "When you go to Warsaw," she continued, "I want you to take your dear ones to my old castle near Cracow. Your welcome there will be assured. Dimitri" (she smiled) "will forward at once a letter to my banker in Vienna. Here is a paper prepared for you, which you can discuss with him after his return. Read it only when out of Russia. I will not have even one friend here know of my plans—last of all, Dimitri Trepoff. His honor shall be safe in my hands! I will take Durand with me. She is free, and can work with our friends there. I shall strive for my liberty. Once free, I am absolved, forever, from further active co-operation with the order! I shall find friends, if I live. My fight is now for freedom, not pardon. You must guard my secret. I will not call on Trepoff. He must not be ruined; he must keep his faith! My banker has faithful correspondents and agents on the west coast of America. We have tested them before. I will know of your whereabouts from him. You will hear from me. I will contrive the means!"

Her bosom was heaving; her eyes sparkling. It was a fight for life and love now!—not mere existence; for a new lord sat on her bosom's throne! "You will come and say 'Good-bye' before you go. Dimitri can arrange that. I ask you to keep in regular correspondence with my banker. Give him always your movements. He will have help and means to aid you. I depend on you utterly, if you are alive, and I am preserved to need your help. Now, tell me of yourself, and all your plans." I now laid before her the visions of my own happy future life as I saw it flowing down the coming years. And Hermione joyed with me. It was hours before we finished our long final arrangements. Every contingency

was discussed. I was astonished at the intimate knowledge of every detail of the Siberian life and régime which she exhibited. Her own high sources, Trepoff, and the able Durand, had given her every detail; but she had a great store of knowledge of her own. Her dark companions! I was now at the limit of my visit. Her banker and I would settle every future detail. The ardent woman longed for the day to commence the Asian voyage. I knew that her pathway would be made smooth by love; and the parting moment came too soon. I rose to go as the evening shadows gathered. As I kissed her lovely hands in "Good-bye," I promised her, sacredly, the fulfillment of all her wishes. It was with a loving glance of womanly devotion she threw her arms around me, frankly kissing me, as she whispered, "My brother now!" I knew of a verity that gallant Dimitri Trepoff had won a rich return to the love which filled his whole existence now. A half-hour with the hospitable Brigade Major followed. I learned that General Obranovitch had been relieved as President of the Summary Court, and ordered away to Warsaw. And this was a welcome relief! I had charged the faithful Durand to come and see my sisters; for now she could freely enter and depart, and bear all our messages. Soon the twinkling lights of the fort were far behind me, and the sleigh dashed over the frozen Neva, through the now thronging settlement on its surface. I was happy at last; for I felt a confidence in Hermione's secret resources. The obligatory devotion of her powerful friends in the mysterious order was also hers. And then, freedom forever from all chains! As I lifted my thankful eyes to the glittering stars, twinkling quietly down on the scenes of my adventures, I thanked God it was well with me at the last. I had crowded much experience into a few weeks; and so I was content now to turn my steps homeward. Past the place where the now-silent spy had been strangled I dashed on to meet my friends over the cheerful table. All was merry animation. The arrival of Governor General Komaroff was expected in a few hours. Serge Zastrow was only approachable on one subject—the wedding, which was to occur in three days.

Dimitri Trepoff was joyous and alert. He had seen Madame Mouravieff, who, by common consent, was delegated to tell him all the ladies knew Hermione's story, and looked forward to her future happiness. With us all busied in our varied preparations, time's feet flew; for the happy day arrived. I had visited the soldierly Prince Komaroff. He welcomed me warmly, and I duly informed Madame Mouravieff that Hermione was henceforth neutral, and would abandon all her dangerous association forever. It were idle to tell of the thousand details of the happy marriage of Serge and the sweet Vera. Hermione had already sent her letters to all the ladies, which testified her gratitude; for Durand was a busy woman in quieting the secret brotherhood forever. As members of the family, we were all permitted to be present at the mansion on the Moika in the morning. Two hours before the wedding, the lovely bride, arrayed in superb robes, received the formal visit of the pere d'honneur and mere d'honneur, with her parents and family as witnesses. The golden-jeweled crucifix and gold salver with bread and salt, were presented, on behalf of the sponsors, as typical of the Greek faith, and of the coming dignity of the young matron. From the Church of the Guard Regiment, soon came Dimitri Trepoff, as best man, in glorious panoply and wedding favors, to notify the bride that the groom awaited her at the church. Through the grand salons, filled with superb presents and the offerings of a circle which adored Vera, in stately cortége, we descended. The sponsors led the way; the bride followed, with the radiant groomsman. The princely parents then headed the family; and merrily did the steeds prance through the crowded streets, till, at the grand entrance of the church, we descended. The noble Dimitri conducted the happy bride to the magnificent altar, where her ardent lover, in the garb of his profession, awaited her there before the jeweled shrine. Passing down through the splendid temple, hung with its tattered banners and relics of the departed brave, the great high canopied altar was reached. Right and left were ranged all the proudest nobles and beauties of St. Petersburg. They closed in after us in a glittering

circle, as the superb church was without seats, like all temples of the Greek faith. A burst of angelic music from the male choir broke the silence; the white-robed and bearded priests knelt before the superbly decorated altar, encrusted with gold, silver and gems. In the one great gallery, all the younger officers of Serge Zastrow's fleet were stationed in a body. Their commanders were conspicuous in the circle of princes, generals, diplomats and nobles below. The sponsors stood directly behind the radiant bride and groom. The family were gathered in a circle immediately in rear of them. At the side of the peerless bride and noble-looking groom were the best men, holding the two golden crowns over the lovers now to be joined soon by the apostolic blessing. A flood of gentle melody stole through the splendid old fane. The alternation of the chanting of the Lord's Prayer by the boy sopranos, with the ringing responses of the men, was thrillingly sweet. The interesting and solemn service was heightened by the deep bass intoning of the bearded priests, awful in its rich impressiveness. The honor of holding the crown in air for an hour and a half over each head was divided by several of the "jeunesse dorée" of the near friends, wearied not in well-doing, as they gazed on the lovely bride in her white-silken robes. Matrimony is said to be imminent when a young Russian accepts that friendly distinction! In the open doors of the church, bearded sailor and genial burgher crowded, a recognition of an orthodoxy never denied. Around the altar, three times, then marched the new couple. Many smiles were furtively exchanged by the assembled ladies, as, in kneeling for the nuptial benediction, Vera's light foot touched the praying carpet first. "She would rule the household," according to the old proverb. And, Serge's generous strategy was observed in this! Now the rings were exchanged. In a sonorous voice the final blessing was said. A grand burst of melody rang out, and, to its triumphant strains, the happy officer and his wife passed down through the glittering throng. Here flashing diamonds, glittering orders, splendid uniforms, and superb dress adorned the flower of the local notables. Hundreds of carriages,

whirling away now, sought the grand entrance of the Mouravieff mansion. The family party, headed by the happy pair, received, through the sponsors, the heartfelt congratulations of their crowding friends. Vera was inimitable in her spirited and youthful beauty. Dimitri Trepoff, the social lion, presented fair damsels and blooming beauties, who little thought his wished-for bride was immured now in the gloomy vaults of the star fort. But Arline Oborska's eyes were fixed on the star of hope! At dinner, a royal board was set for fifty. The opulence of the east and unrivalled beauty of Russian plate made the feast a Sardanapalian splendor. I could only close my eyes and dream of the days of Rurik. Nothing merrier in the world than a Muscovite wedding feast. On these occasions, old Boyar customs reign supreme. High rose the merriment; the health of the Czar and Czarina was drank standing; soft music floated on the air from a concealed orchestra. The "health of the bride" brought Dimitri Trepoff to his feet. As every glass was raised, laughing cries of "Bitter! Bitter!" were heard. Our joyous new-made husband was then forced to kiss his wife each time the cry was raised, until the blushing Vera drained her glass to gain a respite. The old custom was then powerless, till a new merry challenge. In happiness and gayest expansion of spirits, the whole party sought their carriages. In a triumphal procession we escorted the departing couple to the Moscow station. I followed, thinking of the prisoner's adieu. Arrived there, where a special train awaited the distinguished pair, champagne was served to all the party. To the music of loving "Good-byes" the happy lovers departed for Warsaw direct.

So, sweet, darling Vera had at last joined the Navy! It was with heartfelt emotion I bade them both "adieu," to meet again at Warsaw. Vera unclasped a magnificent diamond necklace, which she wore at the reception and dinner, and showed me engraved on the clasp the words, "Hermione to Vera." Dimitri had given it to the sweet bride, with a letter which touched her young heart, on behalf of the loving prisoner. For the falcon, even with clipped wings, had yet her magician in the faithful Du-

rand. "Tell her," said the happy girl wife, "I shall never part with it. I will think of her in love and fond remembrance till we meet once more." And her eyes were sweet in prophecy as they rested on Trepoff. Two days more and we were to leave Petersburg, perhaps forever! We were to take the same evening train and accompany Prince and Princess Komaroff to Warsaw. It was the wish of Count Mouravieff to have Dimitri Trepoff leave quietly with his charge on the afternoon before our departure. The presence of General Komaroff and the powerful Princess would aid in ensuring silence from the spies of Haxo. Dimitri Trepoff was at last all ready. He had only to take leave of the lovely Empress and receive Count Mouravieff's last counsels. His outfit was ready. His faithful old orderly, his valet, a young officer as secretary, with Hermione and her maid, would be the party. At each principal station, he would be able to use all the local official facilities. It was his wish to safely place Hermione, as soon as possible, at Irkutsk, where she would be personally in charge of the Governor General Mouravieff, and after that a powerful arm would secretly shield her. These things were all talked over as we drove to his house. It was almost a home to me now, after leaving Justine and Madeleine at the family mansion. Vera had given him personal gifts, and a loving letter for Hermione, with her own picture, exacting a promise of a return.

We were soon at ease, in his sanctum. The next day would be his last, for six months, at home. His ménage was in thorough order, as frequent long inspections were his duties.

His going was a secret from all. He had already the imperial messenger passport. He also received extraordinary orders for double-team post sleighs, after he had left the 2,000-mile railway. His route lay via Moscow and Perm, to the Urals, into Asia as far as Tiumen. Here the sleigh journey would begin.

"How strange, Grahame," said the wearied Major, "how rapidly events crowd on us! In thirty days, if nothing intervenes, we will be at Irkutsk, on Lake Baikal. Our Hermione will be really an inmate of the Gov-

ernor General's family, although nominally, a *deportée*." "How is that?" I cried, in astonishment. "Oh! that is some of Countess Mouravieff's magic. Governor General Mouravieff's wife will at once ask her to act as instructress of her little daughter in music. This takes her out of police custody. This employment is common with both the superior convicts and the deported people of rank. That station will close the eyes of the curious. She will be jealously guarded thus from every harm. I wonder every day more and more at the Countess' easy sway of all things. She has directed me to bring Hermione to her, day after to-morrow morning. It will be done secretly after we leave the prison and I have receipted for her as my prisoner. My special train will start at two in the afternoon. We will then run directly past Moscow, only stopping a few moments for change of engines. So, Haxo's spies will be baffled. Madame Mouravieff desires the presence of your sister Madeleine, and will go herself to the station with Hermione. In this way, no curious spying can annoy me as the Czarina's envoy. No one will suspect who she is; and, none dare to molest me!" he said, with flashing eyes. On the morrow I closed up all my own affairs. I notified Hermione, through Dimitri, that I, too, would see her at the Moika mansion. Dimitri and I had the will witnessed. I would be able to deposit it with her banker, a powerful Viennese finance baron, a name known wherever the coined red gold rings in trade, or a sail glitters on the seas of commerce. Dimitri and our whole circle were to dine with General Zastrow, for his house was now inviolable. Telegrams from the happy Serge and Vera announced their safe arrival at Moscow. Trepoff passed a portion of the last day at the fortress. He easily arranged with General Davidoff to take his charge away next day, with no formality. In this he was greatly aided by the gallant Brigade Major, who divined the blossoming prison romance, and he scented the mysterious protecting influence now shielding the graceful head of the unknown.

A note from Hermione forwarded me a cipher, of which I was to permit her banker, personally, to take a copy. I was directed to permit no one but him to know



of its existence. It was under seal, and not even to be opened in Russia. It contained all her future hopes of freedom hidden on its filmy sheets. Trepoff informed me that he would forward us telegrams from the principal places to the Vienna address for me. He also promised a full dispatch from Irkutsk, as he had now the right to use the superb government telegraphic service unquestioned. At every post and city on the great high road to the Pacific is a working office with operators, speaking Russian, French, English, and German. Such is Russian foresight, one-half of the official business being transacted on the magic wire—a preparation for that future extension which will astonish the world. I called in the early afternoon to pay my respects to our powerful ally, the noble Count Mouravieff. His prudent consort did not wish him to be exposed to the awkwardness of another meeting with Hermione. It was to me a "Good-bye" to one of the most remarkable men of the age. And his consort wished him to be innocent while she amicably hoodwinked him! Seated in his "cabinet de travail," the world-worn noble received me graciously. I thanked him for his friendly offices, and great kindnesses to the imprisoned woman.

"Say no more, my dear sir. I regret all your troubles here," was his easy reply. "But, your sympathy led you into a false position. You will, I hope, remember that you have met warm friends as well as meddlesome officials. It is a lesson to other heedless strangers. It shows how effective are our sources of information as to all sojourners. Our great land is misunderstood by the outer world. We are aware of that," said he, with a cynical smile, "and we profit, nationally, by it. The Russian policy, my dear Colonel, is neither to permit any dangerous foreign influence, nor to regard any trifling external criticism or detraction. We are a defiant and an easy-going people, secure in our power. I am sorry for your lady friend—a gifted, wayward, drifting human soul, I suppose," he continued, smiling. "Most of the actions of women are without the slightest regard to reason or consequences. In that lies one great charm of the sex! I will see, however, that no personal indignity

falls on your strange waif in her exile. Time may bring her a pardon; and, I hope, greater prudence in her future adventures." With every pleasant expression, he acknowledged my adieu, remarking, "We may meet again; the world is very small nowadays; so, au revoir. The whole world are globe-trotters now!" I joyously regained my abode. Our last evening together was a happy one. Madame Zastrow was the recipient of a beautiful antique bracelet from Hermione, with the simple note, "This bracelet was my beloved mother's! Accept it from your mysterious guest. Farewell, and forgive me! Hermione."

Morning came. The day of our departure was, at last, peacefully dawning. Dimitri's military promptness had covered all his preparations. At nine o'clock he left me to conduct the saddened Siberian voyager to the kindly welcoming shelter of Countess Mouravieff on the Moika. It was nobly done. To let a sister woman feel that the long journey would commence from a friend's house, even if it was a trip "by order"—"in the name of the Czar!" Thanks to her, it would, perhaps, end happily under a roof, graced by a member of the same princely family. I removed all my belongings to the Zastrow mansion. I devoutly blessed the hospitable soldier's home in leaving it; for I had found noble friends there. Soon my own beloved Madeleine was with me. We joined Countess Mouravieff and the Princess Komaroff in the boudoir of that lady's splendid home. The Count was away at the Council; Governor General Komaroff was also with him on "affairs of state." An hour passed away. The maitre d'hotel announced Major Dimitri Trepoff. Madame Mouravieff turned to me with her ready wit. "My friend, I shall trust to you to occupy the Major while we ladies receive his companion. I will give you, however, a private opportunity to confer for the last time with Madame, before their departure." She would not complicate the gallant guardian officially! It was but a few moments when the great lady, at the door of her boudoir, received the fur-clad and deeply veiled Hermione. Drawing the Major into an anteroom, we then proceeded to our final confidential conference. I

had learned to love the gifted, generous, and manly soldier with the affection of a brother. I was loath to leave him. Still, it was for Hermione's sake! Allons! I loved them both! When, in an hour, the luncheon was announced, we then entered, and, with consummate tact, Madame la Châtelaine ignored the parting. I kissed Hermione's hand in silence. I read in her smile of peace and the face of my dear sister that the two foes were fast becoming friends! Traces of tears lingered on all the ladies' faces; but our little coterie became a cheerful one. Time was flying, and Countess Mouravieff said to her guests, now ready for the parting: "Major Trepoff, I will drive to the station with your friend. You can trust me! The other ladies will stay here. Mr. Grahame will remain till you have your party all in readiness. We will then drive around the city until five minutes of two, when you can meet us at the station entrance. Leave your own valet on watch at the door." It was forward now, with God's blessing.

Dimitri arose and took his leave of all the ladies. He was now our chosen knight errant. Madeleine thanked him for his brotherly kindness. The parting was as friendly as his unselfish services to us all demanded. He whispered to me as he wrung my hands, "I will telegraph you to Vienna, and then to New York, or the Pacific, as you may notify me of your address through Hermione's banker." He was gone at last—gone with the heartfelt "godspeeds" of all of us! Countess Mouravieff led the party into the boudoir; then she retired with Madeleine and Princess Komaroff. Her delicacy in taking the dangerous Arline Oborska alone to the station with her, showed all the thoughtful refinement of her womanly sympathy. Muffled and veiled, in the fleecy Russian wraps, no one could tell who Madame Mouravieff's companion was.

I was now left alone with our lovely and high-hearted protégée. It was the parting moment. In her eyes shone a steady light of contented resolution. She mercifully made that parting brief. "Go now to my old home! Think of me when there!" she said, with tear-gemmed eyes. "Place a wreath of flowers on the tomb of the

dear ones whom the mad whirl of hopeless revolution carried out of this sad world! You will know, my dear brother, when you are at Vienna, that Arline Oborska, born free, will either die or attain once more her liberty! I shall see you some day in America! How and when I will escape I cannot tell, but I am fated to be a bird of passage. I will greet you next summer in your lovely Western land! America, to-day, is free from coast to coast; and I shall be a dweller in your gates! I have no country now! There is no longer a Poland! America shall be my home, if I live to reach it! Now, promise me, my friend and brother, that you will not let Dimitri ruin himself for my sake, in any mad schemes for my release! I want him to be untouched by any shade on his official loyalty!" I bowed my head.

Countess Mouravieff now tapped at the door. "Al-lons! ma chère!" was her silvery summons, the signal to begin the long journey of expiation, "in the name of the Czar;" "for who breaks, pays!" is the surest rule of life. Hermione's fair head lay now on my bosom; her kisses were on my lips, and her thrilling voice murmured, "We shall meet again! Never forget your wandering sister!" Countess Mouravieff led her silently from the room. The two ladies mingled their farewell tears with those of the sorrowing voyager. Down the stairway, sustained by the great-hearted Countess, "the star of Poland" passed from our sight! Lingered on the landing, she threw back one last look of grateful affection to our little group of three. In a few moments, from the windows, we saw the splendid sleigh of the Countess dash over the Moika bridge. A little hand, with a fluttering handkerchief, was extended. I knew, then, that her lovely eyes were turned toward us, in fond adieu. She was gone! And I found myself in a mist which veiled the splendid salon. In an hour, Madame Mouravieff returned. We were waiting there a group of eager listeners. It satisfied us to know that, after a tour on the principal drives, Hermione left the arms of her spirited protectress; stepping unnoted into the train, at the car door, where Major Trepoff waited. Her devoted woman companion received her as soon as the

Major could utter his last thanks, and final greetings to us all. Then the special train sped away, preceding all other traffic, bearing her far away from plotting revenge and all spying eyes. Rapidly returning to our home, on the Admiralty quai, all was in readiness for our departure on the evening train.

The last dinner was one of thankful relief. When it was over, all having been dispatched, we made a final pilgrimage of friendly respect in passing the residence of Count Mouravieff, where the Komaroffs awaited us. And I recognized the kindness of Haxo in several flitting pursuing spies. The old chieftain's adieu to my two sisters was touching. He promised us to watch over the future of our dear Justine when we were by the calm shores of the Schuylkill; for Justine must linger in the tranquil happiness of her country home. The Countess accompanied us to the station. Our train soon rolled out of the great depot. Madeleine was now in loud lamentation for the new friendships too quickly parted; but I watched from the car the graceful figure of the noble-hearted Countess Mouravieff as long as I could see her waving signal. And with a sigh of relief I sank back as the train dashed off at full speed. I had seen my Russian enemies for the last time, and lost the high-hearted woman friend. True, warm-hearted, and devoted, hospitable and alive to every call of kindness, sympathetic and emotional, the Russian lady of rank is a rose blooming in the lonely northern snows! Years can never efface the emotions with which I saw the great Babel disappear, in its winter mantle of darkness. But I left a tribute of sighs upon the altar of a royal hospitality. The sparkling town lights at last dropped down out of sight; and I breathed freer with every turn of the wheels. Only the beating of the flying wheels, only the wild sighing of the night winds through the lonely birch forests, sounded now on our ears! Fatigued with excitement, our heads were soon upon our pillows. The Paris of the north was but a memory now; its fierce alternations of throbbing social life current powerless to rack our hearts again. And would ever I return to drink of the waters of the Neva? En route again! The real

traveler finds a cheering stimulus in the rushing panorama of natural life; for, all merely human elements speak of struggle and unrest. Nature alone gives us peace! Nothing so renewing to worn heart and jaded brain as the calm tranquillity of the unviolated solitudes of Mother Earth! Morning brought us to Moscow. We were there received by the official friends of our charming fellow-traveler, the clear-eyed and experienced Prince Komaroff, adroitly steering his official bark, with a practiced hand, secure in his high lineage from mean intrigue. Komaroff was a solid pillar of the throne. An epicurean sage and bon vivant, he mocked at life. The world was to his practiced eye only a kaleidoscope of changing puppet plays. Two charming days were passed in the old capital, where the star of the great Napoleon, set in Russian snows and shame, first perched on the eagles of France, as he fled out of the land of doom. From Kazan (the first day), from Orenburg (the second), now came telegraphic reports and greetings from Major Trepoff. The ladies were in raptures to know that all was well with the pilgrims of love. Three more days would bring them to Tiumen. The romantic voyage to Irkutsk would begin, over moor and through wild forest steppes.

Prince Komaroff was much interested in Hermione. Evidently the cynical Mouravieff had told him the situation of the daring and splendid woman, who had ventured into the jaws of death. Our little coterie, after dinner, at Warsaw, was enlivened by the brilliant Komaroff's sallies. "Women!" he mused. "Strange, foolish, inconsequent children of caprice! Self-devotion, pique, curiosity, and a general capacity for absolute martyrdom leads them to the scaffold or obscure prison vaults. Revenge for a lover punished, some flood of emotional sympathy, makes the Russian woman as a modern Zenobia. Not unbalanced enthusiasts like Joan of Arc or Charlotte Corday, your Russian devotee of revolution is never a coarse, brutal wrangler like Louise Michel, that uncontrolled firebrand. Women such as Vera Sassulitch, Sophia Perovska, and many others abjured gilded luxury to commit the most daring deeds. It is a strange

fascination, this juggling with life! They are all nervously excited by our political repression. Their minds are filled with a sentimental self-martyrdom. "Grahame," said he, as he puffed his cigarette and enjoyed his *pousse café*, "your lovely friend seems to be but a new phase of the woman revolutionist. Evidently, a superior nature, drawn by fate, into a current she could not resist!" "Mon Prince! you are right," said I; "but I will not talk Russian revolution, even with you! I am astonished to see how far from their proper places Russian revolution pushes these daughters of Eve! The men conspirators are usually gloomy, dull, gloating fanatics; but your desperate women are creatures of fire and flame!" "Perfectly true!" said the Prince, with a quiet smile. "You remember, my dear boy, what Goethe says:

'When in the devil's dance we tread,  
Woman's a thousand steps ahead.'

Tired of wandering over palaces and the many churches, weary of threading the bazaars and shops, it was a relief to our party when we retook the road. Swiftly did we flit along, over the plains where the Russian ravens had fattened on the wrecks of *La Grande Armée*.

As mile after mile was measured, my spirits rose to their old-time gayety. Secure against police interruption, we enjoyed the society of the Governor General and his charming wife. We were now in the limits of old Poland, passing Wilna in the night without leaving the cars. Grodno was left far behind. Next day we were met at the once capital Warsaw by the jubilant Serge and his happy bride.

In the splendid official home of the Prince our party spent several happy days. Nothing was needed to complete the happiness of the mercurial Princess Vera but the final solution of Hermione's troubles. We were rejoiced at a telegram from Tiumen, forwarded to General Komaroff, who, with characteristic *bonhomie*, officially signed a return dispatch to Major Trepoff, which bore all our greetings, bidding them godspeed on the sleigh

journey to Irkutsk, and this message of love was sure to be delivered; for it was "official." Had I listened to the delighted Madeleine we would have made a much longer stay at Warsaw. I feared, however, to compromise our good friends, by secret spying. General Haxo's intrigues were endless. Once out of Russia, I could breathe the air of freedom, and could co-operate with the untiring secret comrades and family friends of Arline Oborska. It was a sore trial to say "Good-bye" to our distinguished hosts, to look for the last time, perhaps, on the gallant Serge and his blooming bride. We had arranged every possible plan for correspondence and telegraphic report. Madame Mouravieff had given Major Trepoff a letter also to the wife of the Governor General at Irkutsk. It acquainted her with our desire to use the government telegraph lines, over the signatures of their two powerful husbands.

Trouble and adversity had now made our little coterie very near to each other. While sorrowing for the separation, we all agreed that it was better for Hermione's interests to break up the knot of her friends. We could not all be watched at once, even by Haxo. Other matters would occupy the cold-hearted police general.

With my passports specially visad for departing by the Governor General, we departed. I changed my route from the main line and aimed for the frontier at Cracow, being really en route to Vienna, via Olmutz. We left the joyous home party to continue the splendid festivities in which pleasure-loving Madame Vera now took a merry revenge for the shortened glories of her engagement.

There were quickly beating hearts and moistened eyes as we said "Farewell." Leaving our friends, we commenced the real stages of our homeward journey.

Twelve hours' run brought us to Cracow. With especial letters to the Commandant, our stay was brightened by that hospitality which is a cardinal virtue of the Russian.

The snows were stretching far and near, spread in a fleecy mantle, over the historic plains of Poland! As soon as we could find the time, I took a detour; and



then, led the eager Madeleine on a pilgrimage to the home of Hermione's girlhood.

Situated romantically, on a wooded ridge, the Oborski castle was a picture of a vanished feudal grandeur; for the lonely forests re-echoed only the wailing winter winds. All was a stern silence. Little hamlets dotted the great plains at great distances. Our wild steeds flew along over the untrodden snow with all the speed of a native freedom. It was a dreary and forbidding scene. I had sent over from Cracow a mounted messenger to announce us. As we drew up in the courtyard, before the grand, arched entrance, I could almost fancy the scene when Count Oborski led his wild retainers out to die for unhappy Poland. Silence reigned now in the old manorial halls. We were met by the steward in charge. He conducted us over the manor. Every nook was explored by my eager sister, who marked the surroundings of our captive's girlhood. And, she was now far away,—a captive! In the old hall the mouldering banners, battered armor and proud trophies of the chase still adorned the walls, which had re-echoed the cheers of the Polish revolutionists. But, the romance of the old had fled forever! Pictures of knight and lady looked down from the walls of gallery and boudoir,—a mockery of these later days! Hermione's sweet face, as a child, also,—a glorious picture of her,—in first flush of her womanly beauty, were in the places of honor,—in the state apartments. Her martial father,—a delicate, lovely sketch of the mother she idolized,—and a fine portrait of the murdered Count Oborski:—who fell under Radzivil's cowardly aim,—were proudly shown us by the faithful retainer.

"And, does the Countess come here often?" I asked of the old butler.

"Ah! no,—Barin," was the reply. "Her ladyship travels abroad mostly. We are always directed in our duties by our lady's agent in Vienna."

So strange are the turns of Fortune's rolling wheel! While we wandered over the corridors of the old manor, its fair lady was being borne over the distant snows of Siberia,—on a dark and dangerous quest for liberty!

And, the halls of her youth were desolate! We were simply but heartily entertained at luncheon in the castle. Our final pilgrimage was to the chapel, where the last of the old line lay entombed. By the resting place of Hermione's dear ones, my gentle companion knelt, praying for the absent one, whose influence seemed to thrill us even here, in the Silent House of the Dead! Would she ever wander back to the scenes of her childhood? Where would be the resting place of my falcon-eyed enchantress? It was beyond us to read the dark Fates! Tenderly wrapt in dreams of the exile were we as we regained our sleigh. In darkening shadows, over the lonely avenues, we sped back to the city where we were to be, for the last time, under the Russian colors! The border was near;—and how we sighed to pass that line! All was now ready! The morning of my last day in Muscovy dawned. Our route now lay through the glorious Austrian defiles, past Olmutz, down the valley of the Danube to the gay, sparkling, pleasure-loving Vienna. Our last duties were performed. I wrote Hermione and Major Trepoff full letters, as did my anxious companions. I sent these to Madame Mouravieff, who would inclose them in official envelopes to her relative at Irkutsk. Last greetings to our Petersburg friends and the tenderest remembrances to the Warsaw associates were dispatched. The frontier was now in sight! It seemed like a blessed dream,—that I could lay down the burden of haunting distrust and forget dogging spies and furtive mouchard! It was not until I had struggled with the Austrian custom officials;—it was only after changing cars and obtaining a snug coupé for our party, in comfortable privacy, and we had placed miles between us and the last black-turbaned, gray-coated sentinel, that I realized I was “out of the House of Bondage!” Whatever exultation I might have indulged in was repressed by the strong desire to aid Hermione in the future. I had been warned of the four powerful sub-divisions of the Russian secret police at London,—Berlin,—Paris, and Zurich! Under good advice, I avoided Berlin, as the Russian Consul General in Berlin is the chief of all

this dreaded octopus-like net-work of secret agents, professional and amateur.

Madeleine was now in the highest spirits. She had found her usual happy-hearted manner! She was not slow to remind me of the promise to tell her all my troubles! As we swept through the romantic gorges of the Austrian hills, I fearlessly unfolded the whole history of my environment. The enthusiastic girl was an eager listener. Before sleep closed our eyes I was justified at last! My beloved one saw how the toils had closed around me! Peaceful, safe and happy were all our slumbers now. At noon next day we were at the Grand Hotel,—in Vienna. No little coterie could be more jocund than ours. We arranged for a pleasant sojourn on the banks of the beautiful blue Danube! For, I could breathe free air in peace! I hastened to leave a card upon our Minister and Consul General. Another pressing duty was to send a note with my card to Hermione's banker,—asking an interview on business. Light-hearted and happy, I then returned to enjoy the untrammelled freedom of the gay, stranger-welcoming capital. Not a single maneuver of the Secret Bureau had annoyed me since Count Mouravieff had discomfited the sly General Haxo. I found letters from Serge awaiting me at the hotel. Rosy clouds of happiness were still enfolding the pair of young lovers. He found time to say that all was well, and that "Colonel Ivan Luboff"—who had been the grim Haxo's factotum,—had been relieved and ordered to the Governorship of Saghalien Island. This is the great penal depot on the Pacific coast of Siberia, at the mouth of the Amur River. It was a practical banishment for the unfortunate subordinate!

"This looks, Colonel, as if General Haxo sought a victim to avenge his own defeat in Colonel Luboff. He punishes him for not more promptly arresting Hermione in the tunnel. However," continued the writer, "Luboff gets double pay out there,—and is a lord to himself, over there. He is not a bad fellow at heart! I shall not be hostile, for I wish to make no enemies now!" I read these lines in the café,—where all the delights of fine music and the special refreshments of Vienna attracted

curious tourists to watch the throngs of pleasure-seeking promenaders in the old imperial town.

A luxury which had been long denied me for some time was the perusal of the cosmopolitan newspapers,—a contrast to the meager columns of the Russian journals! While scanning the pages of the Vienna Journal of the day, my glass fell from my hand in a start of surprise. The fates seemed to linger around our pathway. This dispatch met my eyes. It told me of a swift Nemesis,—and of the dread power of the mysterious order:

### “MURDER AT WILNA. A MYSTERIOUS VENGEANCE!

“General Obranovitch, a distinguished Russian General, was found this morning by his servant, dead in his bed, at the Railway Hotel at Wilna. The General had been ordered from St. Petersburg to Moscow. He was inspecting the frontier. He was formerly Chief of the Trial Military Court at St. Petersburg. He was also at one time Military Governor of Poland. It seems that the General had been quartered in the finest rooms of the Wilna Hotel. After giving a supper to some of the officers of that station, he retired, in the highest spirits. The valet occupied a room at the end of the corridor. He heard nothing unusual. The unfortunate gentleman had been stabbed to the heart. He had evidently died instantly, as there were no signs of a struggle. One of the servants of the hotel is missing. It is supposed the killing was the work of the nihilists. All the General's valuables and a large amount of money were taken,—but, the disappearance of a number of papers and several blank passports can only be accounted for on the theory of a political murder. The unfortunate officer must have been dogged for some time and his movements communicated to the conspirators. The assassin could escape either by Eydtkuhnen or Cracow, as from Wilna a number of trains run daily to these two frontiers. The stolen passports would enable the murderer to escape with several companions.

"The General's secretary says that the stolen papers were of the utmost importance. The theory of nihilistic murder is carried out by the fact that the dagger left in the wound was an old Polish poniard with the motto 'To Polskie,'—engraved on the blade. The General was noted for his extreme severity when in charge of the frontier. The utmost activity of the police has so far failed to give any trace of the offender. The missing man was comparatively unknown to his fellow servants. All parties going to the frontier are now subjected to the minutest search and inspection."

My heart bounded with joy to think that we had not stopped at Wilna. Passing there in the company of the Imperial Governor of Poland,—our little party could not be suspected. We were not a moment too soon over the frontier. I might have been found with all Hermione's papers and cipher,—if searched on leaving Cracow. I knew the whole dark truth! The order,—ignorant of all secret future influences to shield and assist "the Star of Poland,"—had in gloomy, secret conclave affixed the fatal "cross" to Obranovitch's name! For, he, too, had been "removed!"—like the treacherous French woman! It was in revenge for the cold-blooded condemnation of Hermione, that he had been killed! But for the help of the graceful Empress, and the accidental trapping of General Haxo, our own lovely wanderer would have died the death of the dog,—to which he had sent hundreds!

One! Two! Three! Mademoiselle Dauvray.—Radzivil, —Obranovitch! It was surely blow for blow! Terror for terror! For, I knew that the mad old hyena had been slain in the very rooms where he had often entrapped the poor Poles, with the vile plots of the detested "Secret Section." Staring, glassy-eyed,—he had been found, appealing to the pitiless Heavens, but the avenger had found him out in his hours of dalliance and wild mirth. Some desperate one had struck, driving the cold steel into his merciless heart, with a Pole's bitter curse. It is the broken up duel to the death of the fanatic conspirator against the law's minions! "Vengeance is

mine, saith the Lord,—I will repay!” The blow was as cruel, as deadly, as if struck by the official headsman, “In the name of the Czar.” And, so Obranovitch had been removed! Hermionè was avenged! I resolved to conceal this from Madeleine,—already harassed enough by the past! Fortune helped our cause in one respect! There were hundreds, many hundreds of miles between Hermione and this deed! Yet, General Haxo would know that it had been struck to avenge the lonely woman, whose ultimate fate was absolutely unknown to the heads of the nihilist order! And, he might appeal to the Czar and follow our defenseless one with new tortures. Trepoff must be warned! The very secrecy needed to protect our plans to help the Siberian wanderer, and the silence, self-enforced, of Hermione, as to her effective plans, had caused her friends in the “order” to fear that she might already have been secretly tortured. For, she could be also put to death in those far-off regions, where the prisoner’s wail of suffering never reaches the ears of the Imperial family. And they, the Dark Brotherhood, could not know of the secret influence shielding her! So, they had struck back in a swift vengeance! That night, with my dear one, making merry at the opera, I could not shut from my sight the vision of the stern old tyrant, dead in his sins;—struck down by an obscure and unknown hand,—a judgment swifter than the feet of the flying steeds bearing Hermione in a long, stretching gallop over the snow-mantled plains of Siberia toward Irkutsk, the Winter City,—by the great inland Lake Baikal,—to be there cut off from and forgotten by the world. It was a singular fate that had cost three lives already, in the chase of the bright-eyed wanderer! Surely swifter than the panther’s feet is the lightning stroke of the dreaded children of Bakounin! I could fancy the old General, in those splendid rooms, recounting with a wicked leer his deeds of prowess in exterminating the hated Pole. It might have pleased him to describe Hermione’s beauty and anguish of heart as she stood there helpless before him, to hear the pitiless lips of the old Draco growl out her doom! And, he had only sealed his own! Fool in his cups! At his side, the disguised waiter

may have been at that moment measuring the very spot to plant the fatal blow. What were his dreams, as his eyes closed for the last time in peaceful slumber? Did no fell warning chill him as the assassin's knife fell in the darkness,—cleaving that wicked heart in twain? Horrible as was this deed, it was the sequence of years of the most ingenious cruelty. In an American city I had seen written in blood, on a piece of linen, a record made by a Siberian prisoner—"The red record of Poland!" It gave a list of great Polish families and the fate of the different members. The words "Shot," "Died in Prison," "Died in Siberia," "Hung," and other gloomy phrases, told how limb after limb of the old family trees had been lopped off by the axe of the executioner. One beautiful Polish lady of high family was whipped with the knout,—on the bare back,—on a scaffold,—before a Cossack regiment. Then, she was abandoned to the jeers of the wild riders of the plains! Insanity and death ended her sufferings. These were Obranovitch's triumphs!

When this old record came back to my mind, I could not wonder that the mad secret Vehmgericht met the slaughter of their innocents with a personal attack on the head which wore the bloody laurels of a stern, conquering General. They returned the horrors of the rack and the dark cell with the knife of the midnight assassin. Fast behind these gluttoned butchers of the helpless followed the wolf-like feet of Revenge!

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE CONVICT SETTLEMENT AT SAGHALIEN—HERMIONE'S RUSE—ON THE BLUE PACIFIC—TREPPE'S REWARD.

Merry Vienna! A "looker-on" has here much to amuse his world-wearied appetite! Still, in spite of the local attractions, I was early busied next day with the calm, executive man who was Hermione's banker.

The cipher was copied, a receipt given to me therefor;

—her will I deposited, an acknowledgment of that fact was mine, after my seals were placed on the document. It was inclosed in an envelope to her personal address, of which I took a memorandum. I found the man of shokels, florins and guilders to be a real man of "mark," for he was silent,—and evidently knew all from Hermione. The faithful Durand had forwarded full letters by their "underground mail" system.

In view of the weeks of our stay, I decided to study my Siberian wanderer's last instructions with care. There was abundant time before me. So it was in the intervals of social pleasures, sight-seeing, and daily enjoyments, that I pondered over her "Last Words." I knew, or suspected, her ultimate wishes. I was not surprised to find she meditated a voyage to America,—not "in the name of the Czar." The document of instructions given me, with the other papers, was explicit, as follows:

The finest coasting vessel of 125 to 150 tons available on the Pacific coast was to be sent on a so-called "trading voyage" to Japan and the Arctic Ocean! This vessel was to await the arrival of a commander who would bring a letter from Hermione. It was to report to a well-known shipping house in Hakodate, Japan. From there, the voyage to the Siberian coast was only two or three days. This house was a correspondent of the great banker. They would have full confidential instructions at Hakodate. These would vary with circumstances as developed.

I was asked to clear the schooner for fishing and trading. I could thus obtain for her papers giving her a fair sea character from Cape Horn to Behring Straits,—from San Francisco to Hong Kong. My Hermione asked me to select a working commander, for the boat. He should be a veteran of the wild, roving traders and fishers from San Francisco. I was to, also, ship several of the Russian-speaking sailors abounding in San Francisco. They are all hunters, whalers and traders, as well, knowing every nook of the Siberian coast from Possiette Inlet to Plover Bay.

Under pretense of outfitting and repair, the vessel could lie at Hakodate, several months if needed, under the orders of the local agent. Short cruises in the Kurile



Islands would serve to disguise the real character of her mission. A perfect means of communication would be by the reliable Danish cable from Japan. This under the Reuter agency control, was free of Russian influence. The general plan of these orders had been sent to the banker, who was directed to dispatch one of his trusted men to Hakodate. He would not leave till the attempted rescue was achieved or all hope was lost. It was now nearing the end of December. The schooner must leave San Francisco not later than March first. Her real commander (an ex-Russian naval officer, of Finnish origin), a hardy Norseman, would go to Hakodate, via Suez Canal, at once and take out one or two selected subordinates. This was Hermione's plan to save Dimitri Trepoff's official name! He knew nothing! Ah! The brave Falcon!

The vessel was to be chartered for nine months, with a privilege of extension. I was asked to use the name of the banker's agent at San Francisco, as mine would attract some attention. Funds for the whole trip would be furnished by him. Hermione's personal supplies could be put aboard later at Hakodate. The abundant free-trade outfitting establishments were ample there. A private note to me asked me to make my way to San Francisco as soon as possible and prepare to send off the vessel.

"How I will reach the coast, or at just what point, I can not say, my dear Grahame, but I will prove to you that your Hermione is really a bird of passage. I know I will succeed,—for Trepoff's sake! You will receive a cablegram, if I am fortunate enough to embark. I then will make my way over the Pacific to San Francisco. I am free when well off shore! Au revoir in America. If I live,—I will reach your free land of the West. The orders at Hakodate will be explicit. I shall use all the power of my money,—for Trepoff's sake—and—my own."

While my dear companion was enjoying all the round of pleasures that Vienna offered, I lost no time in a thorough agreement with the financial magnate. His uneasiness was considerable. Obligated to transact business

with all the continental governments, he regarded my presence on the Danube as menacing the staid tranquillity of his affairs. He, however, gave me a *carte blanche* letter to his agent at San Francisco. I took another to the Hakodate house, which I could intrust to my sub-commander. All our Russian friends were to be kept in a profound ignorance of the whole plan to aid our wanderer;—for Trepoff's eagerness might spoil all! A copy of the cipher would be personally given by him to the real commander, who would soon take the Peninsular and Oriental line of steamers to Yokohama, reaching Hokodate in two months. My "finance baron" gave us a royal dinner as a suggestive parting honor. We were now ready to move toward Paris. I had decided to leave Madeleine there for the winter;—for I burned to see Hermione free! Old friends would watch over Madeleine in Paris. A retired Russian ambassador, a relative of the Mouravieffs, would be her social sponsor and adviser! Our correspondence from the friends at Warsaw and on the Neva proved the signal disgrace of General Haxo. He was under a decided cloud. The gigantic scapegoat, Colonel Ivan Luboff, had already departed for Saghalien to assume his new command. He would go out by steam to Japan, and cross the Tartary Straits, to Dui,—the official headquarters of the military government of Saghalien. With a full regiment under him,—and the military colony of "assisted settlers," as well as several thousand convicts,—the Colonel would have an important command. The great coal mines of the half-explored island are the reserve for future Russian railroad and naval use on the Pacific. Rich in furs, minerals, precious metal and superb timber, the Island of Saghalien, covering the mouth of the noble Amur River, is a priceless jewel in the Russian crown. Our letters proved all was well. Other events had chased the Zastrow family's social troubles from the tongues of club and society gossips! The even tenor of daily life continued in the family. Serge and the fascinating little Princess were compressing all the enjoyments possible into his brief leave of absence.

In a week, we sought the ease and freedom only to be

found in "glittering Paris." Our hearts and minds were at last free from all personal anxiety. I welcomed the repose due to a life released from the daily reiteration of the subject which had so long engrossed us,—and homeward my eyes were turned! Actively pushing my preparations for the departure to resume the status of an American sovereign, I visited the banker's agent in Paris. My addresses were registered and every possibility of misunderstanding avoided.

"Homeward bound!" Blessed words to the world-worn American! My eager anxiety as to our wanderers was soon dispelled. I was on the eve of my departure for Liverpool when the bank sent me the wished-for message:

"Irkutsk, Siberia.

"We arrived here yesterday; splendid health; very comfortable trip. My friend with the family now. I leave in one week for inspections. Back at St. Petersburg four months. Write often. All safe now. Kindest welcome. Answer.

"Trepoff."

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With thankful heart, I penned a reply.

"Major Dimitri Trepoff,

"Irkutsk:—

"Leave for Liverpool to-morrow. San Francisco my address. Affectionate remembrance from all. All business now executed.

"Grahame."

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Major Trepoff and I had arranged that all my own letters for him should be sent to the American Legation under seal, and covered, to the Secretary of Legation. This functionary was proud to serve in any friendly way so powerful an official of Russia. And Mouravieff would send them to his brother in the official bags!

Parting is an event of quicker recurrence in middle

age than in unthinking youth! While naturally regretting a separation from Madeleine, her coterie of loving and trusted friends were now a phalanx around her. Both in France, Germany and Austria, she would be a link of the powerful family chain of friends,—all secretly devoted to Hermione. Her youth and lovable qualities endeared her to the whole circle of our connections; and she was eager,—fondly eager,—that I should not lay down my adopted brotherhood till Trepoff was free to make the wanderer his wife at last.

No care for the future was mingled with the “good-bye,” for another season would bring us together,—after these anxieties were shadowy memories of the past. The last good-bye was said!

The tossing green billows of the channel were passed in safety. England’s chalk cliffs rose up dull from out the hovering fog, which seems perennial. Through that garden spot of the world,—past the old fields of the wild Wars of the Roses,—I whirled away. At Liverpool, my good old friend, the “Etruria,” proudly led a stately Saturday morning procession as we threaded the sluggish turns of the Mersey. I was off to aid at the farther end of the unwilling journey.

The last adieu said at Queenstown, our ship rose and fell on the heaving waste of wild waters of the Atlantic; every impulse of the throbbing engines found its echo in my heart;—for the engines seemed to click out, “She shall be free! She shall be free!”

In the quiet days spent on the great ferry, my mind regained all its old-time philosophic balance. Far from ignoble spies and lurking intrigue, I was happy. The wild winds thrilling their Aeolian song through shroud and rope; circling sea birds, gracefully curving in their airy flights; every dash of the ocean surge;—all was Nature’s own untrammelled freedom. No dark Russia there! It was the wind-swept harp of liberty that rang in my ears as I paced the swaying deck. I had resisted the utmost feminine diplomacy of my Madeleine as to my detailed movements! My bosom was sealed as to Hermione’s attempted ocean flight! One imprudent word might ruin all!—I was dumb! The low fog drifting away

from Sandy Hook showed me in a few days the flag of our native land floating on its beloved shores. Our pilot had scrambled up with his bunch of papers from the funny little jolly boat. We were soon struggling with the blue-coated customs fiends, after gliding up the handsomest bay in the world. Passing the light guards of the enemy, in the shape of the predatory hackman, it was with a thrill of joy, I gazed on the huge diamond in the immaculate expanse of linen covering the proud breast of the haughty Seneschal of the Fifth Avenue. The carefully-arranged locks, waxed mustache and unblushing disdain of the Hero of the Daily Struggle for Life cheered and invigorated me. I rejoiced in the indolent glare cast on me as he twanged his bell and dispatched me to No. 667. I was accompanied by an insolent youth bearing a pitcher of ice water and several descendants of Irish Kings, who threw our trunks all over the room. They held hard to the ropes of the mortgaged luggage, gently humming, "I Owe Ten Dollars to O'Grady." It was even so. I was once more in Gotham,—the abode of the fat policeman,—the volume-like daily journal, with its blood-curdling yarns;—the Mecca of all good Americans,—and the home of the gentle, melancholy and mildly-vicious Dude! But, I feared to go to Philadelphia, lest I might be detained in a loving embargo! I telegraphed for my principal client to meet me at New York. It was indeed my own countree. I saw with joy those carefully-groomed young patricians, extracting their hebdomadal nutriment from the all-nourishing crooked heads of their proudly-borne sticks. Their pale, vacuous visages beamed out from "Del's" windows. They were reflected in awful solemnity from the gorgeous mirrors of the Hoffman "Gallery of Art." I easily arranged "a sudden legal affair of moment" to send me to San Francisco forthwith, and, true to my oath, departed. Dispatches by cable had been interchanged with our sweet Madeleine, at Paris! And, now, my route was, Westward, Ho!

I ran the gauntlet of the minions of that Croesus par excellence, Van Der Bilt,—the agents of Dr. Omnipresent Depew,—and was, by the favor of Divine Providence,

enabled to escape safely from all the accumulated horrors of Chicago! Thanks to a lucky star, I safely passed the muddy Missouri, rolled through the land of the Dakotahs, and, flitting by the great inland capital of the uxorious Mormons, with a sigh for the early demise of the great Brigham, I was in a week on the Pacific slope. I mourned over Brigham Young! It was easy for me to recall the void left in many aching hearts by Brigham Young's too short amatory career. He was only loved by some fifty wives! I shuddered when I thought of his manifold troubles;—for the temporary responsibility of one woman too many had plunged me in sorrows all too fresh in my memory! Down the Humboldt, and into the beautiful passes of the Sierra Nevada, my train thundered. Under the shadows of the grand old pines, gazing down into the amphitheaters where mountain lakes dimpled their glittering bosoms under the forest breeze,—past snow-clad summit, and dark olive depths of cañons, where the antlered deer drank from diamond pools,—I hastened on. It was a chase,—a wild chase to save one whose mysterious influence chained me to her cause!

Lumbering, hulking grizzly and lithe panther wandered even now in those leafy ravines! Winding rivers flashed, thousands of feet below, as we tore down the frail iron pathway,—twisted around the scarred hillsides defaced by the miner's pick. All was free,—all was new,—and my heart was bounding! Here the only tyranny was that of man's own passion, or the coarse greed of gold! No sneaking emissary of dark despotism could stand between me and God's own sunlight!

The smiling fields of the green Sacramento Valley glided past me. Soon I saw, from the pier at Oakland, the distant flag on the old fort at the Golden Gate. It fluttered in a breeze sweeping over the blue Pacific in one unbroken path from the Siberian shores. Thither, my heart followed the beautiful and unfortunate Hermione! Would I live to see the silver sail come up on that far blue, bringing her out of the House of Bondage? For, I had made her cause my own! On me now, alone,

depended the arrangements to effect Countess Oborska's deliverance!

When the jar of travel died away and my daily life resumed its wonted aspects, I proceeded to an immediate examination of the great subject of assistance to my wild Polish beauty. The "talking wire" bore my salutations to the distant friends in Paris and Petersburg. From Trepoff, around the world, came a brief dispatch dated at Nertschinsk,—Pacific Siberia:

"All well. On my tour homeward. Our friend comfortable."

And so, far over the Pacific, Hermione was weaving her web of intrigue to reach the seaboard, and wait for the ocean flyer to bear her off by a lucky dash!—a wild hope! Several weeks were passed by me in the careful examination, through agents, of suitable fast schooners. I labored in gathering from ocean traders, whalers, otter hunters, sealers and fishermen, all the lore of their vast experience on the lonely waters of the North Pacific and the Sea of Tartary!

I was very guarded in my movements. Even in San Francisco, the local Russian interest was very powerful. Many refugees of note had drifted over from Japan and Siberia. Numbers of them gained our coast from Alaska. A thriving little colony of malcontents were here, and kept under the observation of the Russian Consul General. They nested at Ukrania, near the occidental city. I speedily found out in my quiet researches that several splendid vessels were owned by the powerful and criminal ring of opium smugglers, in California. The deeds of some of these vessels and their dare-devil crews recall the days of "Lafitte" and the old pirates of the Spanish Main.

Aided by confidential friends, I obtained guarded interviews with some of the most "knowing ones." It was in no lurking places, but in our best clubs, at our superb hotels, at the picturesque "Cliff House," and in the offices of substantial, staid merchants, I met all these free lances of Fortune. Provided with funds, displaying rich

diamonds and driving fast horses, enjoying the richest tables, choicest wines and specially-selected segars,—these “sons of Belial” seemed to have cast out powerful anchors to windward among the complacent government officials and able lawyers. They had also a heavy banking support, and, even journalistic friends! A convenient blanket seemed to wrap the drowsy heads of the customs officers when any sly plans were in execution.

A number of tugs, some dashing schooners, and several brigs, seemed to be in a kind of feverish restlessness, flitting here and there, on various concealed missions. But gold, easily won—lightly held—was the game!

At the service of a fugitive,—a defaulter,—a schemer, or any wild plan whereby ill-gotten gold could be gained,—these Ishmaels of the sea had the support of the great hoarded capital,—in the hands of the almond-eyed merchant princes of Chinatown! For, there were rings and rings of semi-criminal traders and shipping agents there. In the twenty or thirty squares of the Chinese quarters, policemen, lawyers, smugglers and customs officials all found a place for safely arranging the details of many a bold venture. Under the broad whaling and trading clearance, the white-winged skirmishers boldly sailed out on these exciting quests. The dignified *dolce-farniente* of the revenue cutter aristocrats was never broken by any effective chase of these audacious adventurers;—for in the go-as-you-please atmosphere of San Francisco many undercurrents flowed on in silence! It is America’s jumping-off place!

While selecting a craft which should be a skimmer of the seas, I sought out a man for the quest,—one whose daring and experience could be relied on to the last gasp! —a heart of oak,—a nerve of steel! My daily occupations engrossed me. I indulged in a brief and guarded European correspondence. From the banker-agent I learned that all was well at Irkutsk. The never-tiring Princess Mouravieff wrote me that Trepoff had described their voyage as exciting and interesting. A few days brought me a letter from Irkutsk, which had been forwarded to the Russian Ambassador at Vienna and delivered to the agent of Hermione. This was an audacious



trick, and was well worthy of the keen woman wit I had learned to admire. But, fire must be fought with fire! Hermione's report was that of twenty-five days of superb sleigh travel after leaving Tiumen. To that point, the railway journey was replete with every comfort. The grand defiles of the Urals enchanted her. Every luxury was to be had as far as Tiumen. Her facile pen described the voyage over the great plains of Central Russia, the broad, giant rivers—Don and Volga;—strange peoples, wild tribes, cities nested in the gorges of the Urals;—those great ranges rich in gold and precious stones. Great seignioral possessions of the Galitzins and Demidoffs were passed, where manufactures and even the arts flourished in developing the matchless resources of the precious mountains. Splendid iron and steel factories,—works for dressing the marbles, malachite and other semiprecious minerals. Lapidaries who toiled in perfecting the varied precious stones and treasures of Asiatic Russia. No great caravans of prisoners were met, as the summer is used for the march of the exiled from Tiumen to Irkutsk. To my surprise, she described the steppes as available for future grazing and agricultural uses. The latter half of the sleigh journey, through rolling and wooded central Siberia to the growing city of Irkutsk, was positively agreeable. Four large sleighs made up the party, with double teams obtained on the "Imperial Passport." With the clattering dozen Cossack lancemen, the little party was safe, as the men were well armed. The devoted Durand was Hermione's companion in her covered sleigh. This vehicle, with its abundant fur robes and canvas snow-screen, was a marvel of comfort. Compartments in the body of the sleigh were filled with the little luxuries of travel. My child of destiny said that the usual accommodations of the post stations were fair, and that meats, game, good tea and even wines could be had!

An effective telegraph at every station enabled Trepoff to order his relays ahead. On several stages, sleep in the sleighs was agreeable. The construction permits the traveler to lie at full length in comfort.

Hermione reported the passing of many parties of officials and their families. Some of them were en route

from Vladivostock to St. Petersburg. At several large cities, Major Trepoff awaited for conferences with the officials. His delicacy protected her from all intrusion. Her rest at these towns divided the journey. "I really enjoyed the voyage," said she, "as Dimitri and I agreed not to converse on the past troubles until safely here. My mind is rested. I am in excellent spirits."

Of the grand Baikal ranges, Irkutsk, a splendid town on the great lake, the unwilling "guest of the Czar" spoke with pleasure. Every adjunct of civilized life was there. The large garrison made it a cheerful winter city. The closing pages described her reception:

"On our arrival, my dear brother, I was at once driven to the residence of the Governor General. Madame Mouravieff welcomed me personally, as Dimitri had telegraphed our arrival. I am an inmate of her lovely home. The General, who is just as kind as Count Mouravieff, his brother, is full of consideration and dignified courtesy. His charming wife gives me all the resources of books and music. Her two little girls are angels of budding promise. I owe her sisterly devotion here to the most able and charming woman I ever met, Countess Mouravieff. She has fully prepared my welcome by her sister-in-law by her own letters and dispatches. I shall not compromise any one by telegraphing to you direct. I will hear from my Vienna agent safely; you will, also, from him direct. I remain in social seclusion as regards the external world. There is a charming circle of "deportées" here, who represent, as you imagine, all ranks of Russian political offenders. The "extremists" are silent and nurse their sorrows alone. Many of those who are merely exiled here are in official and professional life. A considerable delegation of the relatives, friends and children of former political prisoners live in prosperous freedom. They are not wishing to return to the struggle of egotistic, high pressure civilization. I have abundant exercise in driving with Madame Mouravieff. The grounds are also free to me. But one associate have I from the official staff. I met with joy my old friend Prince Ferdinand Wittgenstein. He is the General in

Chief of the Czar's forces on the Pacific. He is a gallant old nobleman, whom I have met at many princely houses in Austria, Hungary and Galicia, as he is a mighty hunter. I knew him in my early girlhood, when he was the leader of the Russian colony in Paris. His district embraces the Pacific coast from the Amoor River to Corea. It also includes Saghalien. His headquarters are at Vladivostock. A general inspection of the whole Mongolian and Chinese frontier has brought him here. His conferences with Governor General Mouravieff are of great importance to the Czar. If I feel able to face a journey of seven weeks, I may try to leave here in a month with his party. He will also convoy several officers' families with his official train. It is the one chance open to me for my final escape. Our route would be over the frozen Lake Baikal, down the head waters of the upper branches of the Amoor and through the great gold fields to Nertschinsk. We travel then down the great wooded valley of the Amoor, sleighing on the ice along the river banks to the city of Blagoveschensk,—thus skirting the Chinese frontier. From there, twenty days on the ice will bring us easily to the capital of Pacific Siberia, at Habarofka.

"Prince Wittgenstein will remain at Habarofka, the coast capital, for a month. There is an agreeable colony of ladies and officials there. Though I know no one yet of that circle, I find the 'Free-masonry of Kindness' may cause me to go there, under the advice of my secret friends here! They are hosts,—not jailers,—in their treatment of me. The accomplished Prince knew my gallant father. I can then trust my father's daughter in his own loyal hands! I will consider if I wish to ask a change to Vladivostock, or even Saghalien,—as I would like to see the ocean once more as soon as spring is with us! I shall be guided by advice. You will soon know my decision after you receive this.

"The Prince is a linguist, wit, scholar and gentleman of the old school. He has all the dashing, splendid nerve of the higher Russian, and is a soldier par excellence. It is in his power to assign me to permanent quarters and a circle of selected friends somewhere near the coast. They

will make my exile tolerable. To you, as my confidant, I only say, now, 'Remember!' I trust you in all your judgment, devotion and your untiring kindness. Be every moment on the watch!

"Dimitri is at last gone! You know what I would say! My debt to him I fear I can never pay! You will hear later from him. Nothing in our relations is changed! I will not involve him. He goes on to Yakutsk from Nertschinsk,—then to Tobolsk,—Kolyvan and Omsk. He will retrace his steps, meeting the spring exiles on their march, having examined the four principal centers where deported women are resident. The mines and strictly criminal classes will be looked into by others. All the penal relations of the Siberian exiles will be examined, except those of the life-sentenced convicts of Saghalien. They are the lowest criminal malefactors, male and female, sent from Odessa by sea for violent crimes. There is no consideration on earth which can cause me to in any way prevent Dimitri loyally and freely achieving the mission of the gracious Empress,—for he must help the helpless here!—those even sadder than I am. He is a star among men, and the most delicate soul I ever met, except some one I will not name;—but, you can fit the compliment where it belongs.

"Adieu! Beloved Friend and Brother! I am calm, tranquil,—almost happy. Do write to every one of the dear friends who have labored for me. I can not find words to say how much I love them. It makes me smile through these tears. I have taken the motto of Edmond Dantes,—'Wait and Hope!' I long for but one thing,—as the wearied Greeks of Xenophon searched the distance for the sparkling sea so beloved in olden days:—I lie at night waiting to hear the song of the wild waves breaking on the rocky shores of the coast of Tartary. Then, brother and friend, if you are still true and my star is a fortunate one, let the free ocean take me as its bride,—for I will be free,—even if Death kisses the cold lips of the woman whom you have made the sister of your heart! There is a dark and shadowy land where freedom may be annihilation! Better that,—better the long, dreamless sleep of Death,—than a lingering life to re-

mind me that I am still a true child of Poland,—and,—wearing a Russian chain. In my dreams I see your kind eyes watching over me in my wanderings! Beside you, I can see, too, the dear one whose forgiveness I implore. But, you are free, and you know what it is,—for you have been in the grasp of the Bear!

“For the last time, I send you my unfailing love and say, perhaps never to repeat it,

“I am in life and death, your sister,

“Hermione,

“Once Arline Lazienka Oborska.”

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I felt, on reading these pages, how the passionate aspiration of the proud woman for an untrammelled liberty had nerved her to an almost desperate undertaking. The hazard was a fearful one. If retaken in any thwarted attempt to escape, she would pass into the felon convict class;—and then we could not help her! Our intercessions would be unavailing. The hope of pardon would be gone forever! With all a woman's longing for a future heart-life, she still had the stern spirit of the proud old Polish warriors in her nature. The men who boasted that their lances would uphold the falling skies were her forefathers. It was “even to the bitter end” their wandering descendant would pursue her devious life-path! I made her rescue my one duty in life,—my sacred trust!—for her own brave eyes seemed to be shining on me now.

Her letter roused me to action like a bugle call. My resolution to act at once was now heightened by a dispatch from Vienna to me:

“Managing partner arrived safely in Japan.”

I knew that the skillful commander was then on the ground. It was now the middle of February. The component forces of our expedition of rescue were taking their place for action.

From Trepoff I heard, by cablegram, in a few days;

“Omsk,—Siberia.

“Grahame.—San Francisco:

“Here now concluding work. In two months back at home. Friend gone down river. All well. Last report, good health and spirits.

“Trepoff.”

It was, indeed, now high time to act. Much deliberation and a thorough survey of all things available caused me to negotiate, through a friend, for a charter of the one unrivaled racer of the Pacific.

An old whaling captain, who had made many raids on the Siberian coast in search of whalebone, walrus ivory, sable and fox skins, and other Arctic treasures, brought me the man on whose seamanship and knowledge of Siberian trade methods we would hazard all. Many a voyage had the veteran sailor made to the north. His fortune was due to surreptitious ventures. In these, enormous cargoes of sealskins and the priceless otters were easily obtained from the treasury of the freebooter,—the shores of the North Pacific. Dodging among the Aleutian islands, covered with their protecting banks of fog, he had often gathered a rich harvest from the crowded seal rookeries of the Prybiloff group,—much to the anguish of the capitalistic syndicate of American fur seal princes. He had not scrupled to visit the Komandorski group on the Russian side, filling his vessel with the precious peltry from the Russian islands of “Medny,” or “Copper.” In his joyous moments of expansion, he even boasted of watching until the departure of the Russian garrison at Robben Island, near Saghalien;—and then, taking a cargo or two of fur sealskins from that barren haunt of the mysterious sea-bear, by a bold coup de main, landing them in Japan. He could dart out from the friendly shelter of the Kuriles group,—belonging to Japan,—and so, play hide and seek with the Russians. When chased by the swift Russian cruisers, he did not hesitate to run his boat in shore in the shallows, where the “twenty-five-footers” could not reach him. It was his proud boast that on several occasions (his crew being armed with Winchesters) he had beaten off attacks;—for

he was a grim old sea-dog in his way. Threading the dangerous shoals of the northern groups, he would either run due north and skirt the American coast home to California, or glide back innocently into Hakodate, where his cargo would be transhipped direct to Europe. A hum-drum freightage of sulphur for San Francisco would then bring him home with clear papers. He was discreet enough to say nothing of the bills of exchange in his sou'wester, representing the spoils of his successful raid on the neglected preserves of Alexander Romanoff. He regarded these moneys as a personal gift of a perfunctory nature, made "in the name of the Czar,"—whose health he frequently drank in his libations after these daring visits to a neighboring realm. A king of the sea was he,—and laughed at all kings ashore! A good friend, a kind father,—liberal and genial,—he enjoyed on shore the gradual development of an extensive vineyard and splendid fruit farm,—to which he intended to retire when rheumatism,—not repentance,—would force him to abandon the quarter-deck of his peaceful corsair of the Pacific.

The fragrant Havana and cheering glass cemented our friendship. In the seclusion of a quiet resort, Captain Knox presented his fidus achates,—“Mate Bill Barker.” This worthy was a six-footer from Maine,—a young giant,—boyish and smooth-faced. His glance was keen as a gray hawk. Muscles of steel and nerves of unshakable steadiness told of his years of dangerous experience. Alike used to the rifle and the oar, and a good navigator, he was a man of only twenty-seven. His life had been passed on the sea since he left the craggy shores of the Pine Tree State as a boy on a whaler. Many a huge polar bear, elk, reindeer and walrus had he slain in his apprenticeship. Long nights lying out on the ocean in a light dory, watching for the shy sea otter, had given him a hunter's patience. He could put the ball of his fine rifle into an otter's head as far as it could be seen. The great Bowhead whale had often bounded in madness as this young Colossus fired the fatal bomb-gun;—or, standing in the bow of a willowly whaleboat, had driven the harpoon up to its head in the waiting monster—a

treasure lying on the water,—a leviathan in power,—a racehorse in speed,—and a demon when aroused. The ruler of the creatures of the sea! Bill Barker was thus amply vouched for. With all a sailor's brevity, he accepted my offer of the command of the expedition. I told him frankly there would be a run for home and perhaps a bit of adventure. When I offered to allow him to choose and outfit the boat to be used, his eyes sparkled. I gave him the salary he asked, with the distinct understanding it would be doubled in case of success. This was his first independent cruise in command. He had been second in many a whalebone raid along the Siberian coast. Then, guns and whisky tempted the poor Tchukches to barter their whalebone at a half-dollar a pound (in nominal trade), it being worth a cool five dollars when landed. It was to this ingenious master mind was due the superb scheme to sack the rich Russian fur depots at Petropavloski by a concerted attack of several American trading corsairs. The accidental arrival of a swift, heavily-armed Russian dispatch cruiser alone saved the exposed quarter of a million dollars' worth of peltry. And, he was now looking out for an exciting run!

Under the direction of the Chinese and American operators of San Francisco, he had landed several cargoes of opium from China, via Japan. First taken to the lonely Alaska coast, thence it appeared in San Francisco (encased in salmon barrels) as an innocent, unexamined free entry of fish! Sleek, godly merchants, astute politicians, and greedy, complacent revenue men, knew Barker's peculiar reliability and great prowess in this adventurous profession. A Robert Macaire of the ocean was he. He took all the personal risks;—they held their heads up and were pillars of the community!

Four winter months ashore sufficed to send him out,—empty handed,—each spring on some new, desperate quest. His social tastes were expensive, and, he trusted to luck! Anxious to confide my dangerous secret to but one man alone, I made an appointment with Bill for the next morning. He was to show me the chosen ocean rover of our present need. The jolly old nautical mentor was delighted as he saw I was satisfied with his



young protégé. We drank a parting round to the success of the trip. The old captain's knowing wink was redolent of "opium;"—he scented a rich "run" in the near future.

The fogs were gray over San Francisco Bay next morning as Bill Barker and I stood on the lower deck of the "Tiburon" ferry boat to Sancelito. Past the idle line of British steel ships, gliding by the war vessels in the stream, under the frowning guns of old "Alcatraz,"—the military penal rock of the west,—we darted over the placid waters to the yacht anchorage. As we neared the Sancelito wharf, Bill rolled his cigar in his mouth, gave an uneasy and wishful shrug of his shoulders, saying:

"There she lies, sir,"—with a formal tug at his forelock. When the steamer swung into its easy landing, I followed the horny index finger of my maritime Colossus. Graceful as an ocean bird,—neat and clean from the knight-head to stern davits,—a large white schooner was swinging idly at her buoy. There was nothing to indicate "mischief" in her make-up,—save the gleaming copper, which told of "deep sea" voyages. The enormous Oregon pine sticks towered ninety feet or more to the cross-trees;—the long, rakish boom was drooping gracefully far over the stern. Tossing at the buoy on the rolling swell of one side-wheeler, she dipped her saucy nose in the green bay water, rising like a seagull in her upward swing.

"What boat is that, Barker?" said I, carelessly. A look of pained surprise struggled over the brown visage of the mariner.

"Why, sir!—that's the schooner 'Bonanza!' There was never a boat on the ocean could cross her bows, except the old slaver 'Wanderer.' I think they gammon about the slaver a good deal! She's got two suits of racing sails on her now;—she can do seventeen knots if she's trimmed! We'll go on board of her!" I was silent while Bill paddled me out. We allowed the throng of loungers to leave the wharf. Fifty strokes of his stalwart arms propelled the little dingy alongside.

As I neared her, I saw a schooner of one hundred and twenty feet in length and about thirteen feet draught—when loaded. Her exquisite model was drawn so fine

that her size and beam were not apparent. Over her sweeping waist we sprang. I was taken all over her. Not a plank, bolt-pin or stay which was not specially selected. The sign of a knot could not be traced in the great masts, whipping idly as she rolled at her anchorage.

The one old relic of the sea, who was affectionately rubbing at a bit of brass, here and there, gave a convulsive wink as he sized up my companion. Mahogany-faced and taciturn was this venerable salt. I suspected him of sitting on that flyer's rail and laughing as a nine-knot cutter tried to overhaul the swift Bonanza. She fairly flew when her great balloon-jib broke out, dancing along at fourteen knots, with several little saucy tricks of her own in reserve. Her fame was in every one's mind. She was fit to run for a man's life. I sighed as I left her, to think I would not, perhaps, ever feel her bound over the breaking wave crests, and swing out, far into the ocean reaches, leaving everything behind!

Peerless and beautiful, as the free wind kissed her stretching sails, all she wanted was a man at the helm, some noble race to run. Not an inlet from San Diego to Kodiak, not a bay from Hong Kong, Hakodate, Petropauloski, and Plover Bay, to Victoria, had not mirrored her graceful lines. She nestled in her anchorage, bearing her laurels daintily. A sly demure witch!

It was an hour later, over the soft-shell crabs, birds, and slender-necked bottles of a club lunch, that she became mine for a long charter, at a thousand a month, with an extension, if needed, of a year. I had fallen in love with her.

She was a coy bird to be wooed only in quiet. When the pact was made, there was a thrill in Bill Barker's hand, which electrified me. Captain now, and the peerless rover his charge!

"Am I really to have her on this run, Mr. Grahame?" said he. "Bill!" I replied, "you'll fit her, sail her, and have the whole responsibility. I count on you to the last gasp! I want you to take her and pick out a game crew. You can't clear too quick for me!"

"I can run her out of the Golden Gate in a week,

ready for a trip around the world," said the happy son of Neptune.

"Come in to-night, Bill, and get your orders." I handed him a list of the men wanted, and we regained the ferry.

It was a little too much for Barker; he could not understand his quest. He gazed from the weather rail, uneasily, at Fort Point. No one was near, as the ferry-boat deck was dripping with flying spray. I placed my hand on his shoulder. "Bill! Do you know where you're going?" His eager eyes were glued on mine.

"China! Opium!" he whispered, hoarsely.

"Barker! You're going to the other side, to bring me home an angel."

He smiled in a dazed way. "You find the angel, and I'll bring her home to you all right!" said my Captain. That night, Captain William Barker received his orders at my rooms. Two navigators, seven men, and the steward were to be the crew. A full hunting and trading outfit was ordered to disarm all suspicion. A hundred tons of rock salt in bags below were to be put on to keep her steady. Stores and forgotten articles could be obtained at Hakodate. The customs clearance was rushed through. A sealed letter for the unknown "angel" was given to Bill, with orders to destroy it, if overhauled by any Russian cruiser. By the outgoing Japan steamer *Oceanic*, a bank letter to the agents at Hakodate, notified them of the schooner "Bonanza's" consignment. A duplicate sealed letter was sent to Hermione to their mercantile address, "Meyer and Euler, Hakodate, Japan." Captain Barker was ordered to report his arrival at Hakodate, also his sailing thence, by cable to me. I would have ample time to send a second letter to Hakodate by the next fortnightly steamer for Japan and China. All was now in readiness; the San Francisco agents' custom broker cleared the boat. The *Morning Chronicle* of March 1st bore the simple statement in its shipping news:

"Cleared — Schooner 'Bonanza,' Barker; Kurile Islands. Fishing and trading."

Bill, ready for the fray, stood by me on a tug taking

the Bonanza out to sea, the day after the clearance. Several last packages, marked, "Euler & Meyer (H)," were entrusted to Captain Bill. As we swept around Black Point, and then passing the old flag, on the Heads, I said "Good-bye" to my stalwart sailor. Old Captain Knox gave him a huge silken American flag, which he had carried all over the world. He told him to hoist it in triumph on his return. Out over the bar, far beyond the treacherous rollers of the shallows, did the "sea lion" pull the fretting, restless "Bonanza." Captain Bill was now warned that it was time to cast off. I jumped over the rail with him as the eager men stood by, ready to make sail. Down in the cabin, on the high seas, I then told him, in twenty last words, that he would meet an adviser at Hakodate, who would have the "firm's" signature! Handing to him a letter of credit, calculated to make him safe in any port, I told him at last who the angel was, where she languished, and that his honor and manhood was now my only hope for her successful rescue! In case of accident to me, he was to report to Captain Knox, who now knew all, as we were safe out of Russian dangers. "Bill," said I, you've got the swiftest boat on the Pacific, the American flag over you, and a sweet woman to fight for! Go it, now, and, come in a winner!" The young giant rubbed his eyes. "Mr. Grhame, I'll find her, if I have to go to Herald Island. Trust to me while a stick of the Bonanza holds together!"

"Then, go now!—and God bless you!" I cried. I wrung his hand, and jumped over the brass-bound rail. He sprang to his post. Five seconds more saw the cables cast off! The jib was already set; our tug stopped. A few dozen yards away, the exquisite queen of the ocean foam tossed her head impatiently. The foresail rattled up! All hands jumped to the mainsail. Under a ten-knot breeze, the pride of the Pacific leaned over in the loving arms of the salt breeze and went racing off into the west. As she gathered headway, the American flag fluttered out saucily from the main peak! Captain Bill then waved his last "Good-bye." "My heart" beat high in the throbbing of all a fond heart as the pretty

"Bonanza" showed the gleaming copper, while rising to the long swells of the open sea, and dashed away to the rescue! The tug captain rang his bell. We churned around. I took my last glance of the receding beauty; for already gray mist was wrapping her graceful outlines. The wide spread "white wings" were now bearing my hopes, fears, and aspirations far beyond the lofty crags of the Farallones! To the lonely shores of Saghalien.

The flying "Bonanza" was on the deep once more! My heart was with her as she ploughed over the rolling furrows of the Pacific, gliding off like a phantom,—a thing of beauty, weird, dauntless, and fit for the dainty foot of my Hermione! Home with my tired old comrade Knox to the rest and shadows of the night, we went in silence. With prayers for the success of the forlorn hope, did I journey back into the beautiful San Francisco Bay.

At the telegraph office, I stopped, to cable as follows: "Meyer & Euler, Hakodate, Japan: Schooner-yacht 'Bonanza'—Barker, master—sailed to-day. Consigned to Managing Partner."

I signed the name of the Vienna banker's agent. All was over! I was now free to wait and wonder where Hermione was watching for a white, glittering sail! Gliding down the picturesque Asian gorges, over the frozen streams, past the monuments of Genghis Khan, that mighty conqueror from the Amoor Valley, over the broad bosom of the northern king of rivers, and ever toward the sea—the beautiful sea—she was hastening that very day!

Thirty-five long days dragged by! No letter from Hermione broke the silence! I had flitted away at once to the East, and my bride, the loving daughter of Quakerdom, knew the whole story of my "important business" now; for we had returned together. Her blue eyes looked wondering at me when I confessed the reason of my strange lingering on the Neva, and my sudden flight to San Francisco! And together by the western shores we waited for news! At last came these words of Trepoff; and the telegram filled me with renewed anxiety! Still no news of Hermione!

"Tiumen, Siberia, April 6.

"Home—Petersburg—for two weeks. No news of our friend. She is at Vladivostock, probably. Write and answer. All quiet here. Trepoff."

So, Dimitri's official quest was over, and he was still uncompromised. Soon he would be with his glittering circle of—Muscovite friends. I answered guardedly. If I could only keep him from meddling, till he made his report! And, an answered cablegram to Vienna proved that the banker had received no news of the waif! It was with a beating heart I tore open the next cable in a few days. My bride of a few weeks was as eagerly anxious to meet her new sister by brevet as I was myself! And, our "eyes were turned only to the Golden Gate!" It was comforting, and yet the battle was only on! And it read:

"Hakodate, Japan, April 9.

"Belloc Frères, Bankers, San Francisco:

"'Bonanza' arrived; all well. Cargo ready at Saghalien. Managing partner controls.

"Meyer and Euler."

The "cargo ready at Saghalien!" Then, Hermione was there, and—controlled the scheme! So, the gods were at last good to us, answering our prayers! Over the wild heaving ocean the fleet-footed "Bonanza" drove along under the cold Pole star, shining ever from its chilly ether pitilessly on the mirth and miseries of men! The dainty ocean rover was at her post! The precious cargo, too, was ready at Saghalien! There was little rest for my anxious brain. How had Hermione reached the coast? Why was she at the lonely island of Saghalien—the very citadel of the jailers? At Saghalien! In the lines of a camp. All these were questions of import, which I vainly tried to solve. The letters from Europe gave me only news of our general family tranquillity. All in Petersburg had awaited anxiously the return of Dimitri Trepoff. General Haxo was as quiet and as vicious as a half-frozen snake! In Paris, Madeleine was enjoying the natural life museum of the gay world. I

knew now, in my heart, that the decisive epoch was at hand! My fingers trembled as I opened my next dispatch. It was as follows, and was a message of great import:

“Hakodate, Japan, April 12.

“Lenox, San Francisco:

“Sail to-morrow for Dui, Saghalien, to load coal as home ballast. By orders of the managing partner. All is well. Barker.”

And, so, he had run the “Bonanza” right under the guns of the fortress! I studied for hours over the last dispatch. Artful Bill Barker had suggested, evidently, the selling of the valuable salt cargo at the government coal mines at the port of Dui, Saghalien Island. It would be welcome there, and give an air of innocence to the voyage. He would take time in ballasting the yacht with coal. It provided an excellent excuse to linger there while arranging the loading and discharging. If my beautiful fellow-prisoner was really there, she would probably be at the headquarters. Now, must we only wait and hope. If she were not there, then, a permit for trading and coasting could be had at Vladivostock—only six days’ sail away. At that fort, frowning batteries and swift steam cruisers, made any violent attempt at rescue almost hopeless. The suspense was maddening! But, Bill Barker’s wit was keen! And, the bright-eyed managing partner “had posted him!” I could only wait, wait! On the Amoor river, a half-mile wide at this point, a hundred miles from its mouth, the city of Habarovka is the main capital of Pacific Siberia. From here, Khamschatka, the Tartary coast, and Saghalien, are all governed. It controls the great naval depots of Nikolaevsk at the mouth of the Amoor and Vladivostock. Both of the last are fortified strongholds. A telegraph to all of the great frozen realm, except Khamschatka, enables the troops, the fleet, and public affairs to be rapidly directed. The great lonely Amoor Valley will soon be the main line of the Trans-Siberia railway from Irkutsk, the capital of Asiatic Siberia, to this point. From thence, it will follow the Ussuri river to Lake “Khanka,” and

down the outlet of that body of water to the almost impregnable Golden Horn. This road, built on the north side of the Amoor, the dividing line from China, will be secure from serious Chinese attack by river gunboat patrols. Ten to fifteen thousand soldiers, officials, mechanics, and traders always watch over the great depot at Habarofka. It is too far from the mouth of the Amoor to be reached by heavy hostile vessels. Double-walled log houses, replete with every comfort, are the rude but agreeable homes of the higher classes. Around the hospitable boards here gather some of the very ablest officials and soldiers of Russia. Increased pay and pensions requite these distant servants of the Czar for their winter isolation. It was here, after five weeks of sleigh voyage, in company of several official families, the star of Poland had rested on her weary voyage to the sea. The Governor General and all his friends were kind and helpful. The magic name of Prince Wittgenstein silenced remark and insured attention; and, the government couriers bore unknowingly three letters which reached us while we waited for the final issue. It was on the final advice of General Mouravieff, at Irkutsk, that Hermione had voyaged toward the sea. A marvelously adaptable people, in travel, are the Russians. A picked escort from town to town, abundant teams of the small, wiry Tartar ponies, and all reasonable personal comforts, enabled the long voyage to be easily withstood. Hermione, with her attendant Durand, was ever a cheerful ready traveler. The unfailing devotion of the old Prince made the trip a memorable one. Far from Petersburg, the official shadow on the political "deported" rests very lightly. While the great wooded slopes of the Amoor glided by, Hermione resolved in her mind the choice of her permanent resting place. It was to be fixed by the Governor General of the Pacific Provinces. The old courtier Wittgenstein promised to make the road easy. Several weeks passed pleasantly. The eight hundred mile voyage down the river valley of the Ussuri to Vladivostock was the last stage of the long pilgrimage of the Polish Countess, and from there Durand easily smuggled the letters into the Japanese mail. General



Mouravieff was already agitating a pardon, by private letters to his friends. It was his own wish that Hermione should be near the sea in spring; so that, if the blessed "congé" should happily come she could return to San Francisco by steamer. The summer trip across Siberia is infinitely more fatiguing than the winter voyage; and, she would be free when once on a Japanese steamer. Rough wagons then take the place of the easy-gliding sleighs of winter in the homeward summer Siberian voyages. The two weeks' voyage, through the beautiful valleys, between the Amoor and Vladivostock, was soon achieved. Hermione, from the rounded hills of the Golden Horn, saw the blue Pacific, stretching out in one unbroken sheet to the shores of America, on an April day. The thinning snows were beginning to melt under the warm spring sun; and, the keen Durand found means to send out the welcome letters with these details which only increased our daily suspense. For, two loving hearts now beat in agony!

A formal report to the Admiral commanding the port was the only reminder of her convict status. The fleet was all still moored in the double Golden Horn Bay, awaiting the spring opening of the river. So far, but one dispatch boat was yet in commission. The shallow inlets of the Tartary gulf were still frozen. One day sufficed to place Hermione in temporary comfort with her maid, in an official's family.

Twenty thousand people live in a forgotten corner of the realm under the blue and white flag there. Army and navy officers, civil officials, merchants, artisans, Japanese, Chinese, and Coreans, with a few foreign traders, gave a cosmopolitan air to the "Gate of the East"—Mautchurian hunters, liberated convicts, political exiles, and hardy sailors thronged the busy streets. While the "Bonanza" was flitting around Hakodate, a bit of by-play was going on not far away! After Hermione's day or so of rest, the courtly old Prince Wittgenstein dined with his fair charge. She was now only separated from help at Japanese ports by the narrow strip of the seas of Tartary. "I must leave you soon, Madame," he remarked, as he sipped his café noir. "I shall have to

take the 'Asia' and go over next week to Saghalien. I wish to confer there with the new Commandant, Colonel Luboff, about the fortifications." The gallant Prince did not notice the tinkle of the egg shell China as Helene's cup crushed in her hands! Colonel Luboff!—at Saghalien! Her quondam admirer, and Haxo's spy! And, so Luboff was already there. The impressionable Colonel of the frontier! There are many ways to dazzle and to outwit not known to grim Russian Colonels. And, the prisoner bent her brows in thought. "How long has he been there?" quietly remarked the Countess. "Only a few weeks! He came out from Odessa by steam and then went over from Hakodate! He is only a couple of days' sail from that port. In winter, they use Japan as a base of supplies, when we are frozen up here. There is no telegraph cable to Dui from here yet! There will be one laid later!" The old Prince was unsuspecting of the emotions sweeping over his sweet prisoner now! Hermione's eyes were gleaming. If she could only get to the headquarters at Dui, the old-time charm of her influence on Luboff might lull his suspicions; and, the schooner, it must be near. Here, at Vladivostock, with so many cruisers and the forts, it was evidently a forlorn hope to try and escape. But, at Dui, cut off without a telegraph! Woman's wit has many wiles! It needed only a mere touch of flattery to induce the good-natured Prince to ask the transfer of Hermione, conditionally, to Saghalien Island. Her apparent reason was an aversion to the daily curiosity excited by her presence, and by the many special privileges allowed to her! Three days' run brought the "Asia" to the anchorage off Dui. And, Hermione had carried her point! "It's a lonely place!" grumbled the old Prince. Here was the first penal colony of actual convicts Hermione had seen. A regiment of chosen soldiers, with many military settlers, kept in awe the dangerous malefactors. They were spared death for foul crimes of violence done in Russia, to work in the government coal mines. Their log huts and gardens were laid out on the bluffs, under the sweep of the rifled guns of the fort! In the open roadstead, vessels were forced to lie under spring cables to avoid the

sudden spring storms, when coming in for coal. It was a purely military penal settlement. There was no civil custom house! No law existed, save the arbitrary will of the Commandant. An annual inspection was a matter of mere form; and, the Commander was the local god here! The barge of Colonel Luboff soon boarded the Asia. She had rounded to, and dropped anchor under the frowning bluffs. A signal gun notified the garrison of her arrival. From the gracefully tapering main mast floated now the signal of "dispatches." Colonel Luboff, personally heretofore unknown to Prince Wittgenstein, was soon at his ease. Arranging for the disembarkation and reception of the Prince and his staff at the spacious and really luxurious headquarters, the Colonel was now ready to leave the ship. Seated in the cabin, over the customary cigarette and vodka, the Prince informed Colonel Ivan Luboff of the presence on the Asia of the lovely deportée. There were a number of officers' ladies at the post,—so the Prince gladly learned. Its seclusion was as bearable as that of any distant settlement, being so near Japan. The Prince at last presented the Colonel, who stared in a vague astonishment! Ignorant of the previous meeting of the two, it was a careless matter of detail to the old soldier; for, he would fain bear her back to Vladivostock. Hermione's finger was on her lip when the Commandant sought to whisper a few words to her in private! And, so, Ivan Luboff had hopes! The Colonel's old infatuation was ruling him once more! He made a sign of assent, and then left for the shore, to convey the Prince and suite to their allotted quarters. The artful General, now, was more exhibited in Wittgenstein than the pleasure-loving nobleman. A professional inspection of the island would be made by sailing round it; for, he dared not risk his steamer long in the unsafe bay. After studying all the plans of the proposed fortifications, the veteran Commander proposed to run over to Hakodate for home dispatches. He would receive reports from the local Russian agents using the cable there. These acute representatives of the Czar, gathered up during the winter, bit by bit, a great many hints as to all the intended

illicit descents on the Siberian coast in the spring. The English, Japanese, and Hawaiian flag was often used to cover the illicit traffic of many schooners. They sought illicit trade in whalebone, sables, seal, and other furs; as well as walrus ivory, along the coast. In April, the swift, light steam cruisers of the Russian fleet were to be spread along the whole coast, to prevent the robbery of the natives, with barter of rum, arms and munitions. And, this was Prince Wittgenstein's secret duty to arrange. The American contingent of whaling pirates and schooners were adroitly directed from San Francisco, sneaking over the Behring Sea under cover of our own islands.

Colonel Luboff's positive orders forbade him to leave Dui even for a day. The great responsibility of the command was his alone. His engineer and several of his staff represented him on the voyage, as the advisers of the distinguished visitor. Prince Wittgenstein permitted Hermione to land, with her supposed maid and effects. The three weeks' cruise around the island would busy the Asia. At the end of that period, the Prince, in his capacity of aide-de-camp of the Czar, could leave Hermione at Saghalien. This would be subject only to the confirmation of his action by the Governor General at Habarofka. While we lingered over the last letters, in all the agony of a long suspense, the drama was unrolling its changing scenes far away at Saghalien!

The Asia sailed, threading the dangerous Tartary Straits to the west and north. Her orders were to round the island by the east, and, after a call at Hakodate, return through La Perouse Straits. The navigation was known to be doubly dangerous. The beautiful war vessel, built for a quick passenger steamer in America, by the Cramps, drew now twenty-six feet. The unsurveyed coast was full of sunken rocks and dangerous currents; and, the "Asia" stood well out to sea, and fled away on her voyage. The would-be fugitive was now on the island of her choice. She was received by the family of the second in command, who had sailed with the Prince; for, the old courtier had given his orders. Seated in the spacious reception room of an immense log house, she

tremblingly said adieu to her old friend for a few weeks. She was trusting to fate, and to Luboff's blindness! Her secret guardian had generously offered to provide for her any articles needed at Hakodate. The falcon-eyed Hermione indited a note to Meyer and Euler, which was sent by the Prince, on the one dispatch vessel available at the island. It was a small auxiliary steam schooner of antiquated construction, which made a trip three times a month to Hakodate. This was used for carrying the mail and bringing over officials and small supplies. And, it took the news of his intended arrival at Hakodate to the consul. No other boat larger than a fishing dory was permitted on the island. In another month, a light steam cruiser would lie all summer at Colonel Luboff's orders off Dui, with her fires banked. Hermione's innocent-looking letter was forwarded on the regular trip, so that all her goods could be ready, on the arrival of the "Asia."

It was with a warm feeling of gratitude and a fluttering heart the wanderer said "Au revoir" to the courtly old nobleman. He had tried with all his heart to soften her captivity. In three days after the departure of the missive—the waiting "Bonanza," now docked, trimmed, and with a couple of Japanese pilots on board, glided out of Hakodate Bay. For, the letter was delivered, and it called to action! She stood in boldly to the Tartary Straits. Wrapped in a huge sou'wester, his flowing beard concealing his once-shaven face, none of his old naval friends could recognize Otto von Krusenstern, once a dandy naval lieutenant of the Czar, in the mate who stood by the young Yankee giant, Captain Barker. The hills of Japan dropped down in the southern haze. As a "middy" on a three years' cruise, on Siberian coast guard duty, the young Finnish officer had learned every nook and inlet of the Asian coast, and the Kurile chain. And, the Vienna banker had sought him out as secret pilot of this runaway dash to sea! Hermione trusted to the resources and vast experience of the house of "Meyer & Euler." There were many trade secrets locked up in the calm commercial exterior of the Baltic-bred chiefs of the firm. The cipher had enabled her to ask instant ac-

tion, while the "Asia" was away. If the American vessel had not arrived, she informed them she would try and be smuggled off on a Japanese trading schooner. She could hide in the lonely "Kuriles" till a passing American whaler might touch. She might thus safely reach the Sandwich Islands. As long as Prince Wittgenstein was in charge of the "Asia," she knew that her flight would not be desperately followed. Her positive knowledge that "Otto von Krusenstern" was at Hakodate was the reason for urging immediate action. He had been dispatched at once to his post by that "Secret Order," which was bound to follow, and shield the woman who had executed the most dangerous and important mission of the dark fraternity since the tragic death of the last Czar;—and, Durand had sent him her cipher greetings. The ex-Lieutenant was like all Finns, a sullen enemy of Russia. He hated the great power which took his frozen land by the sword. He would use every energy to at once try to rescue his lady chief. Failure in this attempt meant her immediate departure for the interior, where she could never be reached by friends. And, so the fair woman at Dui had staked all on this one chance.

Colonel Luboff, distrusting his subordinates, and already chafing at his long exile from the higher social pleasures of Russia,—and of the Austro-German frontier,—disdained to be familiar with those under him. He had already made himself disliked as much as feared. Seated in his spacious official home, with every European luxury (so easily obtained from Odessa), the rooms decorated with priceless furs, and surrounded with books and all the small comforts of the educated gentleman, he thought of Hermione as the steamer sailed away. The "King of Saghalien" mused long over the strange chance which had thrown her in his power again." Yes! she was alone,—in his power!—but only partially so! Would the Prince take her away? Powerful friends like Prince Wittgenstein, the Mouravieffs, and the Governor General at Habarofka, would not countenance any extreme oppression of the haughty deportée! No! He must flatter and cajole her! It tempted him,—the game was

so near his hand! As for underhanded schemes, her dauntless nature was such that he knew death would take her far beyond his reach if he dared to menace her! He knew her too well! If he attempted any unwarranted advances, he might be assassinated!—for, she had friends! He knew and feared them!—for Obranovitch was dead! He knew well why! Why should he not marry her?” He turned the subject over in his mind, as he at last wended his way to the residence of his second in command. He would sound the feelings of the fair prisoner while yet alone here. Her natural dignity would prevent her from telling all to Wittgenstein! Yes!—he would try this plan! But,—the Czar’s permission! He could obtain it later, perhaps,—and with it General Haxo’s eternal hatred! Colonel Luboff paced down proudly to the rooms where Hermione awaited him. A bright hope that a nihilist bomb might “remove” General Haxo crossed his mind. There would then be marriage,—and another life before him! He dismissed this vain dream! His attentions to Hermione might be remarked by his jealous subordinates. The garrison was now honeycombed with secret schemes, ambitions,—and some of them were even secret nihilists. To secure “tête-à-têtes” with his inamorata presented some difficulty. Several days passed before he could find courage to act on the marriage. Hermione had received the Colonel with a gentle, womanly dignity. The gigantic soldier was no match, in social diplomacy, for the beautiful Polish Countess. He blundered soon into frankness:—for his affection was even eager and unreasoning.

“Colonel,” said the lady, fixing her star-like eyes on him, “I can give you no answer to your proposition until I am free,—and have a hand to give. You must not expect to marry me without an Imperial permission. Could I give you my hand, as ‘a prisoner of state,’ and disgrace you? Only ‘In the name of the Czar!’—you must wed!—for, you are a high officer: only the General’s rank is to be won! I must await a pardon!” She was silent.

“Madame!” said the Commandant, “I will now give you every liberty consistent with my duty. I hope that

Time will draw us nearer to each other. Trust to me, and, I will trust you! Let us be friends!"

"Let us talk of this another day," said the caged falcon. "I can not remain here under conditions so at variance with your duty,—and all that I have still a right to preserve:—my own personal freedom of action is all I have left. Remember that I am a woman,—not a slave!"

An hour of continued fencing followed, in which this subject was ever the one theme. The Colonel took his leave, feeling at last that his very honor as a soldier forbade him pressing for an answer now;—and he feared Wittgenstein. She was—alas!—a prisoner of state! Her hands were tied!—and his, too! If she were only a convict,—ah!—then she would be his lawful prey! Hermione watched him, as he strode down the walk. Her eyes could now reach the sweep of the blue Japanese Sea, smiling far away to the tropic south! Weary of the long struggle against Fate, her gaze was fixed far out on that ocean, where the wild winds war with the waves. For days she had waited for one signal there,—the American flag as her signal of a speedy deliverance! Would it never come?

One leap of her beating heart!—a mad throbbing of her bounding pulses!—around the wooded point the "swift Bonanza" swept into view, scudding along under a snowy cloud of canvas! She then swung into the open roadstead at "Dui." Down dropped the sails, and the schooner was quickly moored to one of the great government buoys. A little roll of bunting slowly climbed to the masthead. She was breathless as she watched there. It broke out, at the main truck, into the lovely ensign of the free—the nonpareil beauty of the Heavens,—the old "Stars and Stripes!"

The agitated woman burst into tears! Her quick eye had told her that the white stranger was no petty trader. Such vessels never were permitted to land at Dui. The three thousand convicts cooped up there might make a break for liberty, and some of them at last escape. Their nerve and daring had been proven by desperate men swimming the Tartary Straits on two logs lashed to-



gether with wild vines! They traveled, threading the gloomy forest, half starving, in search of an American ship.

There were friends on that boat! How could she reach them! It would be madness for them to seek her openly in the garrison! She too well knew Russians are the most acute spies in the world. Every Muscovite, high or low, watches all near, to observe what furtive schemes are dwelling under their conventional exterior. And, there was the schooner, and, alas!—she was helpless! Colonel Luboff, a “gentleman detective,”—a Secret Section official spy,—could not be easily hoodwinked. She must now find a way! It was hours she sat there, looking at the great white sea rover, and wondering if she would ever tread those snowy decks. The only thing she now dared to do, was in company of the ladies of the house,—to show herself as near the landing and as often on the parade as possible. It would not be long before the name and character of the vessel would be known to her. It was equally true that any friends on the boat would prudently and cautiously seek to open communication. A sudden inspiration seized her. The adroit Durand was legally free! She could, perhaps, meet the sailors on their landing;—or even one of the commanders. But, every eye among the local spies would be on her. It was, at once, that Hermione, however, sent out her cool, experienced aid-de-camp to gain news!

While Durand was away,—the Polish Countess wondered if she dare approach Colonel Luboff to aid her escape! Alas! no! His official position would suffer;—and, his passion was only too self-evident. His personal infatuation would make him cling to her, also, as her jailer. Force was impossible. He must be outwitted! But, how? Any action should be immediate,—before the return of the “Asia;” or the dispatch boat’s arrival from Hakodate! For, the “Asia” could easily overhaul the schooner,—and perhaps the dispatch boat might capture it!

Madame Durand was soon back. The boat was an American yacht-built trading schooner from San Fran-

cisco! It was sent from "Meyer and Euler" at Hakodate to exchange its ballast cargo of salt for coal. The Russian government agent at Hakodate had promptly made the welcome purchase! The officers of the yacht were not, as yet, permitted to land. A Russian detachment was on guard continually on the decks. The "Bonanza" also lay within half rifle-shot of the landing under the battery's guns. A captain of police met all boat parties at the landing. He permitted no one from the boat to go through the garrison,—lest some English spy might note the defenses of the valuable coal depot. It was only the valuable salt cargo which had brought her over, as salt was a precious commodity! Hermione's passionate heart leapt up! It was her own, this strange vessel, to direct at her will,—if she could only gain the decks. Long did the Countess ponder while she watched the busy swarms of weary convicts unloading the sacks of rock salt ballast. Alongside were already warped several coal barges. A day or two more would suffice to put the hundred tons of coal ballast on board. And, now, time was already flying on swiftest wings.

Darkness settled down. From her own window, the prisoner could easily see the swinging masthead lights of the lovely strange craft. Twinkling through the cool spring evening shadows,—they were to her twin bright stars of Hope. A desperate resolution seized her. She would now use those fatal arts which had drawn all men to her feet when she was the all-enslaving, bewitching nihilist queen. It was the last chance for freedom! A note hastily scrawled was soon dispatched through Mme. Durand to the stately Colonel Luboff, as follows. And, the glittering bait was soon before him,—where he read eagerly the specious lines:

"My Dear Colonel:—

"I have already heard of the beauty of the American yacht, now here. I would like to see it. Will you call and tell me if you can permit me to make a visit to it,—of course, under your escort?"

It was only signed with an initial "H."—yet it aroused him! It only needed this mere hint to inflame Colonel

Luboff's ardor. A golden opportunity for a "tête-à-tête" of a couple of hours on board,—free from all the eager garrison gossips, was,—very alluring. His orderly soon returned with a billet;—for he saw now the rosy gleams of an easy victory!

"Madame:—

"I shall have pleasure in taking you in my own barge to see the yacht to-morrow at two o'clock, for the schooner sails day after to-morrow. I hope that you can accompany me at that hour.

Yours,

"Luboff."

Sleep visited not that night Hermione Oborska's eyelids! She was prepared to use the half of her fortune to bribe the commander of the boat, if need be;—but, Luboff must be outwitted! At noon next day, Hermione was calm and serene,—while the Colonel had passed a sleepless night! He would, at last, rule the caged falcon! Wrapped in her heavy furs, she descended the stairway to the landing on the Colonel's arm. Her heart sank as the successive sentinels saluted. Their rifles and the guns of the great tiers of batteries commanded the decks of the American schooner at long pistol range. It seemed hopeless to dream of an escape here in this armed death-trap!—and her heart throbbed in an exquisite agony! A twelve-oared barge, manned by ex-convicts, bearing the blue and white cross, swept alongside the "Bonanza." Colonel Luboff was received at the ladder by Captain Bill Barker in his very best nautical style. Hermione's eyes sought those of the young giant. He steadily returned her gaze. No sign of recognition was there. He was an utter stranger! The decks were slowly traversed! The loading was now nearly done. All was as neat above as in a lady's boudoir! Proudly did Barker listen to the praises of the Commandant, who could, however, not be tempted to leave the lovely lady at his side. Patience! "Wait and Hope!" The Colonel asked carelessly for their destination.

"We will go down to Nagasaki and then load with Japanese goods for San Francisco," said Captain Bill, with

a meaning glance at the lovely lady;—and her bosom rose and fell in a newly-dawning hope.

The quarter-deck and cabins were soon reached. As the party descended into the splendid and roomy main cabin, a seafaring man rose respectfully.

"My first mate, Captain Olsen," said Captain Barker. The tall sailor saluted Colonel Luboff. In an instant Hermione recognized "Von Krusenstern!" Swifter than the flight of an eagle, the grand hailing sign of the "Mysterious Order" was exchanged! And, this swift flyer was so her very own to command! Her jailer and her secret comrade faced each other in friendly discourse. The cabin seemed to whirl around her! The mate respectfully left the saloon, as Captain Barker proceeded to do the honors. Champagne! Beloved champagne! It always touches the Russian's heart and loosens his tongue! The Colonel was glad to hear the latest news by way of America. And, he received a bundle of welcome journals in high glee! He had many questions now to ask of the sailor. While the cigars were being discussed, the quick-witted Hermione sought the deck for a few minutes! There was but five or ten minutes to spare, unobserved. Countess Oborska seemed most deeply interested in the explanations of the tall mate, who now showed her various matters of seemingly lingering interest. He, keen as a flash, knew all her wishes when Colonel Luboff and his host emerged from the main cabin. Hermione's suddenly evolved plan was an inspiration! Colonel Luboff was in excellent humor! Her friends knew all her plans! And, the tempting letter, with the floods of champagne, had blinded him!

"Colonel," said the fair prisoner, "what a beautiful ship! I should like to take a sail in her for a short distance. She must move like a bird! I never saw so lovely a boat!" It afforded him a chance to display his local importance and lofty dignity! Now Luboff could not well make love before the two sailors, or his own boat's crew! It was already the earlier season of nature's awakening! A dozen or more miles away was the lighthouse of Dui Bay, on a lovely promontory called "Lookout Point,"—a splendid high

road from the fort to that matchless viewing place afforded good sleighing in winter. Not loath to exhibit his official power, the Colonel, made unusually amiable by his potations of his favorite wine, said:

"Madame, if the Captain is willing,—we will sail down to-morrow, as far as 'Lookout Point!' I will send the conveyances down there. We can then drive back to the fort. Captain Barker can easily land us in his boat. I will send a luncheon down, so we can enjoy the view, and see them stand out to sea!"

Captain Barker was only too happy. The party were, however, requested to be on board by twelve, as the young commander wanted to get well off shore before dark! The calm, steady eyes of "Von Krusenstern" blazed, as he shook the fair hands of the lady when she descended to the official barge. Colonel Luboff was jolly. He was far too wise to interrupt his tête-à-tête next day, with the prying eyes of the garrison ladies. Hermione's maid, the sly Durand, would alone accompany her. Past the guards and grim cannons, the happy Countess walked to her house, escorted by the delighted Colonel. That night, Luboff dreamed of her dark love-lit eyes! Hermione heard only the song of the wild waves in her slumbers!—the song of Freedom! The two stanch friends on the "Bonanza" were ready, cool and taciturn, as true sailors ever are in face of danger! And, Hermione's eyes grew steely as she thought of one awful last resort. Morning dawned; the coy racing beauty tossed her head disdainfully, as the little rollers lifted her graceful sides. And, at eleven o'clock the sleepless watches of the night were forgotten by the smiling beauty who had at last evolved a little plan of woman wit!

Leaving all her goods and baggage strewn carelessly around, with a merry "au revoir" to the envious garrison gossips, Hermione descended the battery steps with her gleeful admirer. For, Luboff felt in his proud heart that his time had come! The quiet-faced Durand carried a little satchel. Papers and some money, to which she had clung, with a few small articles, were all. And, in that harmless-looking receptacle she had a last, pow-

erful agent,—a mysterious friend,—which was her own especial charge! Durand's face was pale and stern!

With demure stateliness, Countess Arline Oborska entered the barge! Escorted like a Princess, the Star of Poland trod, once more, the decks of the "Bonanza." Every preparation was already made. The schooner was all ready,—shipshape and sailor fashion. The great white sails were flapping now, ready to catch the stiff breeze,—as the sturdy crew stood by.

The police captain returned the schooner's legally visad papers. A last bottle of wine was drank "to the Czar's health" and then the sentinels were withdrawn! The great barge slowly left the schooner's side! Captain Barker, bronzed and eagle-eyed, stood by the wheel, where the two Japanese pilots now obeyed his uplifted finger! At the foremast, the sturdy mate "Olsen" only waited the word.

Up went the jib!—and the graceful boat swung slowly to her course!

"Set your foresail, sir!" cried Barker. And, Colonel Luboff's eyes shone in pleasure.

"Aye!—aye!—sir!" was the mate's response,—and the creaking blocks rattled as the foresail was quickly raised. Hermione was muttering, with trembling lips, "Which plan?"

The second mate stood by the bows, with two men to haul in the cable. A post boat was hanging on the buoy to cast them off.

"Let go all!" was the anxious Yankee skipper's order. The dainty "Bonanza" slowly gathered headway. At last, they were off! Watching at the huge mainsail, Mate Olsen on a nod now joined the men who sprang from the deck as they drew up the great sail.

"All snug, sir!" cried the mate,—for the racer was now under a good headway, skimming along at twelve knots. Seated at the stern, Colonel Luboff complacently eyed the shore gliding by. His valet most obsequiously handed the wine to the dreaming lady by his side. The Captain and mate joined the happy Commandant in a glass to the successful voyage. "Ah! I shall never forget this day," cried Luboff, who was growing expansive.

There was a good-humored smile on Captain Bill Barker's face, as he ran up his twelve-foot stars and stripes. Standing at the halyards, he dipped the flag of the free to the forts! The great blue and white war flag of Russia was dropped in courteous acknowledgment of the American's salute. If Colonel Luboff had been a practical yachtsman he might have noted that on the topmasts a cloud of racing canvas was all ready to unfurl! The topsails, a balloon jib, and a big spinnaker, were there to catch the fresh breeze blowing off the virgin shores of the mysterious Siberian forests. In merry international converse, the flitting moments gayly passed! Down in the cabin the party sat together at table! The white-winged racer was rising and falling on the curling waves. She drove along, swooping like a sea hawk into the curved billows of the shallow strait! Colonel Luboff was overjoyed, for he looked forward to a deliciously happy afternoon! In another hour, with the beautiful Hermione at his side, he would watch this fleet stranger bearing out into the Straits of Japan. And then!—he would tell the waiting story of which his heart was only too full;—the story of his deftly-laid plans! "Hermione must be his! Rank,—future, were nothing when he thought of the coming days of blissful love. He would make her life a dream now! He would marry her! He surely would gain her consent;—for, she was now helpless in his hands." Your Swedes and Finns are great bottle-men! Thesecondmate and pilots were left in charge of the deck. "Olsen" kept the Colonel's glass full, and he toasted deeply and often. A half-hour now would bring them to Lookout Point,—and the parting moment was near! The schooner's boat was already towing astern. Hermione was positively merry. She was playing the star part now! Her maid had attracted the attention of the valet. They were on deck looking at the panorama. A nimble steward quickly uncorked the silver-necked bottles,—and the fun was at its height! A day of days for the Colonel! Hermione saw the approaching lighthouse gleaming white ahead,—while the amorous Colonel addressed his conversation more and

more warmly to her,—she cast a meaning glance on the Swedish steward. He then retired for a moment, to give some last orders to the steward. He returned, followed by the servant with a replenished tray!

“We must soon say good-bye, Colonel!” said the jovial mate; “will you try some of our California champagne? I have some of an excellent vintage;—and, we pride ourselves on it!”

“With all my heart,” exclaimed the joyous Commandant. “To your successful voyage, Captain!” he cried, raising his foaming glass. While bending his eyes on Hermione, he whispered a few burning words, emboldened by his libations. And, she was ready with all her womanish witcheries! There was triumph in his eyes! The glasses rang merrily. In three minutes, Ivan Luboff, “His Russian Majesty’s Governor of Saghalien, was in a sleep which seemed to be a paralysis;—for, “poppy and mandragora” had brought him helpless to his fair enemy’s feet!

Hermione’s ruse was successful! The gallant Colonel was heavily drugged! At once, while he was laid away on a couch, Crocker sprang to the wheel. The disguised mate then assisted Hermione to the deck. On,—out past the lighthouse point,—the lovely yacht sped away like a startled deer. The Colonel’s anxious valet was careful enough to now remind Madame Durand that they were passing the place of landing.

“We are running too far down the bay!” he remarked, though loath to break off his dalliance on the deck.

“We will run on a little and then, come about,” said the mate, who now found time to whisper to Durand to keep the too curious factotum in a muddle of Muscovite flirtation. A half-hour from the moment when the last cup was pledged to the Czar, the dainty “Bonanza” ran in, under a point six miles from the light. Captain Barker, with an amused smile, noted a warning signal flying now from Lookout Point. He also saw the puffs of a distant gun from that battery. It means chase,—and,—danger!

“Just out of range!” he laughed, as the “Bonanza”



plunged on. "Now, quick! Look alive!" he cried to his crew. The schooner's cutter was hauled forward. At a signal from the "Yankee giant" half a dozen men carried the unconscious Colonel to the side of the schooner! The valet howled when he saw this,—but the cold muzzle of a Colt's frontier pistol was pressed to his head! Behind it was the calmly resolute Barker!

"Get into that boat!" sternly ordered the mate;—and the valet followed his insensible master, who lay, spread out, like a hibernating bear!

"Give way lively, now!" cried Von Krusenstern, as he quickly sprang to the tiller. In ten minutes, the boat was back and swinging at the davits.

Colonel Ivan Luboff was now lying on shore under a tree in comfortable unconsciousness,—while the frantic valet was running up and down the beach. The schooner's head swung round and the sails filled in a jiffy. The mate alertly sprang to his station. Hermione's face was hidden, as she stood there with her head on the bosom of the delighted Durand! In her hand she grasped a revolver!

"Death before his touch!" she whispered. Her face was now ghastly pale!

The "Bonanza" veered to her course outward for America! The sails drew with a snap. When the newly-set topsails were at last sheeted home,—like a water-witch, she defiantly tossed her beautiful head and raced off, stretching away to La Perouse inlet, like an ocean greyhound.

The mask was off at last! Von Krusenstern and Barker were now laughing by the side of the excited Countess.

"Give us only one hour to pass that last headland, and then the "Asia" herself, can't catch us! Madame!" said the young Captain. "You are at home here, under the stars and stripes;—for you are going to sleep to-night on blue water,—a free woman!"

Arline Oborska's tears were streaming from happy eyes, as she grasped the bold sailor's hands.

"Don't you worry a moment," he bluntly said. "There's not a man here who will not die for you!" And Bill

Barker's face grew set and stern as he watched that last danger point.

Von Krusenstern conversed calmly with the overwrought prisoner, who saw the wooded shores gliding by as in a dream. Far in the rear puffs of smoke now showed that the battery was loudly giving the general alarm! Barker, glass in hand, anxiously swept the lonely expanse of water ahead,—for dangerous shoals and currents abounded there! In three hours the yacht would make the open seaway. Once in the offing, all pursuit would then be vain. Hermione was soon hidden in the cabin, attended by her brave woman companion. In an hour the last point would be rounded and the straits entered. The "Bonanza" would be out of the Russian inclosed waters, and then could not be stopped! The "Asia," too, was far away. It was a godsend,—her opportune absence. A gray mist was rising now, and a double lookout was kept ahead. Barker hauled down his American flag! The only possible danger was from the armed dispatch boat, now on her return from Hakodate! It was the last chance against them,—the last risk to run!

"Sail ho!" cried the lookout! Barker and his mate sprang up at the warning cry.

"Where away?" yelled the Captain.

"The starboard bow, sir! Small steamer!" was the eager response.

Great Heavens! It was, indeed, the dispatch boat! She carried small arms and a crew of twenty-five, with a rifled ten-pounder gun. "Would she speak them?" It was the burning question!—and all too soon answered, for a puff of smoke shot out from the vessel's quarter, as she toiled along in the rising mist;—and the roar of the gun came hoarsely bellowing over the sea! A fluttering signal went up to her masthead. She had seen the flashes of the battery guns!—and, the hand of the Czar,—the iron hand,—was reached out for his prisoner now!

"How fast can she sail and steam?" was the Captain's rapid query to Krusenstern. The mate said:

"She can do about twelve knots at her best, sir!"

"Then,—by God!—we must run for it!" cried Bill, as

he set his colors half-way up on the foremast shrouds as an answer to delay the fire. Hermione's anxious face appeared at the cabin door. She was ashy pale. She saw all at a glance. And, now the cannon spoke again, and a shell came skipping over the waters! They were not fooled by Barker's trick with the flag!

"Captain, I will throw myself overboard before I go on that boat!" she cried; "or, use this!"—and Barker only smiled as he snatched the revolver from her trembling hands.

"Don't fret, dear lady; just keep below!" cried the resolute young Captain. He motioned to Durand to take her mistress down, and sent a steward to try and conceal them if necessary.

"The Lazaretto!" sharply yelled Barker. "Cover them with the old sails! I'll throw these devils off the track! All hands, now," was his ringing command. The excited men gathered at fore and main mast. The dispatch boat dropped her sails, and slowed down her engines, as she lay balancing on the waves a quarter of a mile away;—for the "Bonanza" had come up in the wind. The little cruiser was black with men now! From her sides, a boat was soon lowered, and six men began to pull swiftly over the freshening sea. Sweeping up to the position for laying to, every man on the schooner was at his post. The mist came down with a sweep, and the sea freshened, as the steamer swung idly, with just steerage way, Barker gazed with an eagle eye, measuring the positions of the two boats!

"Let go that spinnaker!" he suddenly cried, his voice ringing like a bugle call. "Now,—lively with the balloon-jib!"—and, as a second gun rang out, the "Bonanza" tore by at a fifteen-knot speed on the outward track. The steamer's funnel soon gave out clouds of smoke, as she swung slowly around, and her sails were set for the breeze. But, she had lost a precious ten minutes! The great Japanese current favored the audacious "Bonanza." If the steamer could not cross the yacht's bows, then all was safe.

The fog banks lifted, as a bitter breeze blew off the land. The racer quivered, bounding along under the

strain of her enormous canvas. Would the masts hold?—for, they groaned under the mighty strain!

"If we don't blow the sticks out of her, half an hour now, will tell the whole story," said Captain Bill, his teeth clenched as he glared at the Russian dispatch boat,—now pouring out densest smoke. There was no further firing, for the gun was useless while the course was held by the pursuer. With his glass, Barker saw the nondescript crew huddled around the gun, as the "Bonanza" came in range, seeking a channel. The steamer suddenly fell off, and then a sheet of bright flame darted from her side. There were no blank cartridges now. It was a double charge and cut-fused shell! A shrieking bolt passed whistling along near by, skipping along and tearing up the leaden-colored water. The race of the flying "Bonanza" was now for life and death. Every rise to the swell, she quivered like a panting race-horse. It was prison to all and death to Hermione if overtaken! For, Lubboff's vengeance would be shame, and a blotting out from all human ken!

Von Krusenstern, his rugged face dark and gloomy, said: "She'll lose her masts, sir!"

Captain Bill glared as he shook his fist, now, at the laboring pursuer, in defiance. For, only a random shot or two followed, as a great tongue of fog pushed forward by the meeting breezes soon hid the cruiser from sight. The God of the Fog and Storms had fought for them! The "Bonanza" was tearing along in blue water beyond the mist.

"Thank God, we're off the point!" cried Barker, for the Japanese pilot now changed the schooner's course,—heading for the open Pacific! They had passed the shallows, and the pursuer was blanketed in there, among the dangerous reefs and shoals!

"Take in all your light sails," ordered the Captain. All hands sprang to the ropes. "We can beat the whole Russian fleet now!" laughed Barker, as he went below. In twenty minutes, the queen of the Pacific was slipping smoothly along under jib, foresail and a reefed mainsail, standing out to the Pacific. Darkness was coming quickly down. Captain Bill gave an approving glance, as he

noted all snug for the night. He went below to give Madame Hermione her last look of Siberia! Away to the lee, a jagged, rocky point was the extreme end of Saghalien!

"You'll never see it again!" cried the happy Barker; "unless in your dreams! So,—good-bye, brother Luboff!"

The cruiser was soon feeling its way back toward "Dui," as it could not carry the coal for a long chase! It was weak and unfit for the shock of Arctic seas. And as night fell, there was an angry, infuriated man seated alone at the Commandant's house in the fortress on the island. Raging in vain!—for, Colonel Luboff's frightened valet had handed him a little note. It had been given to him by the so-called "Mate Olsen." In Countess Oborska's own handwriting were penciled these words:

"Colonel Luboff:—

"Forgive my little ruse! I had to use an innocent deception! Love is sweet,—but, Liberty I must have, even at the price of Life itself! Adieu! My cordial thanks to Prince Wittgenstein. Forgive and forget,

"Your prisoner,

"Hermione de Vries."

Recovering from the effects of the drug,—his boundless rage was perfectly impotent! He had now lost the fair woman he loved,—the one whose wit had foiled him through his own ardent passion! She was now the "Bride of the Winds!" In the early night watches, the arriving dispatch boat reported the unsuccessful chase of a suspiciously-acting schooner. The "Asia" would not be in for a long ten days. By that time, the "ocean rover" would be two thousand miles at sea;—and Ivan Luboff was now forced to concoct some "ghost story" to account for the loss of his prisoner;—and he feared the stern Prince Wittgenstein's wrath!

Luboff's pride kept him reticent. While he tossed on his bed of sickness,—still suffering from the powerful drugs,—the whole garrison was laughing at the baffled Lothario! In the spacious cabin of the "Bonanza,"—far

out at sea,—Hermione slept the untroubled sleep of freedom! God's own bright stars were looking kindly down on her there,—rocked on the wild waves. Durand was in ecstasies over the forethought of the secret friends in sending supplies;—Von Krusenstern had also most thoughtfully furnished silken robes and Japanese goods, with all the articles the two women needed for a month's voyage. He was not a man to fail in his quest. The cabin was devoted to these two now happy members of the weaker sex. Bill Barker, over a glass of stiff sea grog, sat at ease in the sailing master's cabin with Von Krusenstern. The fact that he was likely to win that double salary, and also have a "big run" on his own account, made him particularly cheerful. He laughed with his companion, as they recalled the mad efforts of the little dispatch boat to overhaul them!

"If a stray shot had touched one of our sticks, though, we would have gone in for a life sentence in the coal mines!" said the Yankee giant. Von Krusenstern was gravely silent. He thought, with a slight chill, that an unavoidable recognition of him (inevitable, if sent on to Vladivostock for trial), would have made him at once a target for a dozen Cossack riflemen on the hillside at the Golden Horn;—for, there is no "revision of sentence" there!

Morning, bright and fair, dawned. Under the five-mile sweep of the great Japanese current, the "Bonanza" drove merrily along at sea under all her canvas. Captain Bill was determined to make an offing as long as he could carry sail. Seated on the deck, with the letters from a new friend, my Philadelphia "Blue Eyes"—and conning my own dispatches, the ocean wind fanned Hermione's fair cheek with all the ardent kiss of a wooing lover! Looking backward, toward the dim west, where the shadows of the saddened past lay behind her,—the fair lady wondered whither the fates were leading her! No longer a dejected, anxious schemer,—her lovely brow was lit up only with the rosy flush of morning,—as the gallant little water sprite danced along over the waves. She was free! And, in the sigh of the willing winds, one beloved

name was echoing now!—for, Trepoff waited for her afar, in the land of snows and ice!

It was with a roar of incredulous laughter that Prince Wittgenstein received the news of Hermione's flitting, when the "Asia" steamed into Hakodate Harbor. The dispatch boat had instantly returned there to give the alarm. Prince Wittgenstein now gravely counseled with the Commander of the "Asia," who assured him that he dared not follow her out to sea; and, in fact, the chase was useless!

"I have my orders," said the blunt old sailor. "What matters it one woman more or less, at Saghalien? Luboff must console himself with another!"

The philosophic old nobleman called on Colonel Luboff, however, for a written report, on his return. This was most admirably handled. Colonel Luboff suppressed one-half of the facts, and then, the Prince promptly pigeon-holed the other. He was clear,—and Luboff was the scapegoat! It was vaguely rumored in St. Petersburg that an American trader had been bribed to rescue the lady by her nihilist friends. So much for History! But, Luboff dreamed dreams and saw strange visions of coming trouble! General Haxo would be a relentless foe!

The conservative Meyer and Euler assured the Russian Consul of their entire innocence. They supposed a heavy bribe had been, perhaps, used with the Captain; and yet, the Danish cable bore, that same day, the following brief announcement to me,—making my heart bound with joy:

"Grahame,—San Francisco:—

"Your passenger safely shipped. Managing partner on board. 'Bonanza' at sea. Watch at San Francisco for her.

"Meyer and Euler."

And they haughtily faced the angered Russian Minister at Tokio, stating that they had no responsibility for a merely casually consigned vessel! With this, they sternly sealed their lips!

Life at San Francisco had gained a new charm! The arrival of this dispatch made us wild with delight. I sent instantly a cablegram to Vienna to the agent, adding prudentially, "Forward this to Russia by letter." Hermione had now been on the waters ten days. Aided by the home current, twenty more would bring the ocean bird skimming along past the Tarallones. If Fortune favored,—and—Dimitri Trepoff!—where was he lingering? Would this sensational departure work him harm?—I feared so!

In ten days I received the following:

"St. Petersburg.

"Grahame,—San Francisco:—

"Returned well. Report ready two weeks. Is news of Hermione authentic? Answer.

"Dimitri Trepoff."

I instantly replied in the affirmative, adding: "Here in a fortnight!" Two days brought me the expected reply,—for I knew both the man and the lover.

"Grahame,—San Francisco:—

"Will apply six months' leave. Coming. I know all now. Keep my arrival secret. Will dispatch from New York. Address 'Brunswick,—New York.'

"Dimitri."

It seemed to me that I could hear again the clash and merry jingle of brave cousin Serge's wedding bells,—borne afar on the breeze from the far-off land of Peter. Dimitri was now to be for life the captive of his Fair Prisoner!

Most slowly did the days crawl by, as, with my bride wife an active sympathizer, I waited yet. Time stays not his fleeting foot! I had carefully notified the marine reporter to telegraph me of the very first sight of the white-winged flyer. The "Oceanic," coming from Japan, reported, "Sighted sch'r 'Bonanza' as spoken 300 miles out," and on the morning of the second day after, the dispatch came: "'Bonanza' ten miles out." To gain the



wharf and, with my eager wife, steam out to the Heads in a quick tug was as rapidly done as possible! Lying there just out of the entrance of the Golden Gate,—the storm-tossed sea-bird was awaiting a tug from the Bar. There was no mistaking her. We steamed swiftly for her, and, as we neared her,—glass in hand,—I could make out two women on deck. We dipped our flag in welcome! As we did, a thirty-foot whip-pennant unfolded its silken folds at the mainmast. A few moments brought us alongside! As I leaped over the low schooner rail, Hermione stepped toward me, the “brightest eyes” filled with sparkling tears of joy. I handed her the first offering of America’s roses, which my wife had brought! In a few moments the young matron and her ocean guest were clasped in each other’s arms! Captain William Barker strode up,—and, as his horny palm closed on my eager grasp, he said:

“Mr. Grahame, I’ve brought your angel home to you! I kept my word! She is an angel, too! The boat has been just as lucky as the lady is pretty!—God bless her!”

Captain Von Krusenstern, standing there with the happy Durand, was now welcomed, also! Our side lines were made fast,—and, it was a symposium of unrestrained jollity that followed—a California love feast!

We swept into the glorious panorama of the great occidental harbor. As we passed Fort Point, Captain Bill brought up the silk flag which the old sea dog Knox had given him! In a few moments it was reeved on the halliards. As the lovely folds floated out on the breeze, it was raised by the fair hands of the two happy ladies. As soon as the flag was at the peak, Captain Bill said, timidly, with all Yankee sailor’s pride:

“Countess! you’ll stay under this flag, now, won’t you? For, the Russian knout does not go here! This is the very land that longs for you!”

“Captain Bill,” replied the smiling beauty, “I will not keep you in any needless anxiety! I renounce the Czar of Russia! You found me on the sea, sir! You can baptize me now as an American at heart, to the end of the chapter!”

Down in the cabin, we made a frolicsome party. The

sparkling wine which had proved Luboff's ruin, was poured in honor of good old Father Neptune,—but without any "chemical" flavor à la Luboff! Captain Bill Barker and his gallant sailor brother Krusenstern,—Mouravieff and the friends far away,—were remembered! The gallant and courtly Wittgenstein, and even the amatory Colonel Luboff, were toasted by the two merry beauties. It was an hour of rapture!

"I can understand Luboff!" said Krusenstern, with a sigh—"and—forgive him!"

Last, but not least, as we swung to off North Point at the yacht anchorage,—when the customs officer stepped on board,—I filled up a brimming beaker! The whole circle round me poured out a libation, in which we all joined with merry hearts,—even the staid Durand, who was now a general favorite. When the anchor rattled down, I gave a bottle of wine to our new fair American citizen, who broke it on the brass rail of the dainty, dashing "Bonanza."

"The prosperity of the 'Bonanza,' queen of the Pacific, the flying wonder of the West," was drunk with joy by all;—and Captain Barker blushing spoke for his pet. The crew responded with three cheers;—for Countess Arline, imperious and sparkling in her new-found happiness, had asked Captain Bill to call all the men aft. An extra month's pay and a donation of the wherewithal to repeat the toast to the dainty yacht made the men raise a ringing cheer for the Lady of the Mist!

The curling ripples lapped the sharp cutwater of our "Bonanza," as we left her. The voyage had been strangely propitious! The steady old second mate was left in charge. Soon our party reached the shore. Stepping on the soil of free America, Arline Oborska left the woes of her life forever behind her!—for the voice of no pursuer echoed on the freshly-blowing western winds now! It was a luxury of happiness for us to stop at the telegraph bureau, as we drove to the hotel. Arline, herself, telegraphed all her own friends, as well as her faithful agent at Vienna!

Durand sent a message whose destination was the highest "Secret Circle of the Order," for my ocean-re-

stored "Star of Poland" had left that page of her life turned down forever! She was "out of the shadows of the night!" At our little dinner the queer distribution of Arline's scattered effects was a source of many witticisms. Trepoff had sent all her goods back from Petersburg to Vienna. Colonel Luboff was possessed of her traveling outfit, to sigh over in his lonely hours, and the woman side of the nature of my goddess was seen in a threatened expedition with my Blue Eyes, to gather plumage for our "stormy petrel." For, her coquetry suddenly returned, and this, to me was prophetic of Trepoff's sudden appearance! Did I know all? I was willing to be gently hoodwinked now! The first dinner was over. One name alone had been left unspoken! Serge and Vera, the lovely Mouravieff, Madame Komaroff, our loyal Zastrows! Justine, far away,—and all our friends,—were remembered! Still on the threshold of speech lingered star-eyed Memory waiting there! I saw that the proud woman would not speak the one beloved name! For, there was a wistful tenderness in her smile, a far-off look in her shining eyes. I proposed the health of "the absent," and as her dreamy eyes met mine, I whispered, "Trepoff!" She trembled like a leaf in the storm! A rosy flush lingered on her exquisite cheek,—a shadow as when the sunlight tinges are glowing on the Jungfrau peak! She then bowed the queenly head,—and drank in silence to her lover!

Days of pleasantness and peace were upon us all now! The lovely Arline was but one fair story-teller! Occupied in all the rearrangement of her affairs with the local agent of her Viennese representative, she soon took up all the threads of her various interests, and I waited, vaguely, for some happy chance now to break away to the hanging of the crane in my Philadelphia home.

With my wife as a companion, our visitor soon became familiar with all the attractions of the great city by the Golden Gate;—and I was free at last to wonder and to wait! For, Trepoff was still silent! The fair wanderer's brow grew thoughtful! Our evenings now were all too short! Listening to the recital of her adventures, we followed the friend of our adoption over the great Urals, through the great Asiatic plain and the great passes of the huge

border river of Siberia, down the mighty Amoor. It had been a "personally conducted" tour which amazed us in its glimpses of sunshine and of shade. Hermione recalled with gratitude the untiring kindness of the Mouravieffs, who had given to her a sheltering home at Irkutsk. The fortunate fatuity of Luboff had left all her friends uncompromised!—and the burly lover's shoulders were broad!

I recognized with joy in Prince Wittgenstein a courtly old General I had met before in continental Europe. He was well-known in every club in Germany and France,—and had recalled our acquaintance when Helene told him of the varied phases of the fated expedition, which made her a state prisoner in Siberia. I knew he was sly enough! Had he only sailed away to let Luboff fall clumsily into the trap?

The merry Countess laughed now at the idea of all her past discomforts. "Siberian yarns are children's bugaboos!" she merrily said. "No reasonable person need dread that overland voyage, especially when speaking the language, or furnished with the usual government road passports! I found," said she, "that the travel to and fro was regular, and not even particularly disagreeable, for those accustomed to long, winter voyages. As for the Russians, hardy and able to adapt themselves easily, they laugh at it!"

From Irkutsk, Arline could have easily reached Kiachta,—and then, escaped by Pekin and China, but she would not leave a stain on General Mouravieff's official honor. Her resolution to separate Major Trepoff entirely, from her secret plans, was due to the personal representation of the Empress, by the young inspector. His name was too dear to her to involve him in the slightest suspicion of connivance. We marveled at the brave woman's independence of soul,—her daring, high-spirited conduct! But, she merrily laughed at Luboff's coming troubles! "He would indulge in love-making," she said. "Dangerous for a jailer!"

Woman's wit with love as a guiding star can be a magic charm,—even in Siberia,—and Luboff had a heavy score to pay off now!

Letters came soon. I quietly sent a dispatch to the "Brunswick,—New York" to await Dimitri's arrival;—and I managed to hold my lips in silence! The days happily glided away,—as we all awaited a mysterious something! The next China steamer brought a witty, but tender letter from the gallant old Prince Wittgenstein, to my care. He evidently well knew whither the swift white wings bore away the lovely wanderer. And Meyer and Euler gladly sent it on! Playfully reproaching her with her desertion, the old nobleman closed his missive:

"My Dear Child: If the words of an earnest friend can give you useful counsel, let me now ask you to bury your past in a new life in America! Your delicate spirit can not battle with the wars of human empire and the inevitable death-grapple of systems. Your friends here, our Irkutsk circle, will wish you many years of happiness! The beloved country you have lost, you will find again in that embodied aspiration of the whole world for liberty,—the United States of America! Live your life now for yourself and your loving friends! I think that I can look down the avenue of the future and see many happy days awaiting you! I will not say farewell,—for your memory will haunt me, your face be near me, always! You sweet eyes are 'unforgotten!' I can not hope to say 'au revoir,'—for, I am an old man, and our paths lie far apart. I have tried to lighten your sorrows as far as I could while you were with me. I now kiss your fair hands in adieu. I send you an old man's respectful devotion! I say no more! I am no prophet, but life has every bright, alluring prospect before you yet. The imperial years are still yours! Remember me kindly to your steadfast friend, Grahame, whose pleasant friendship I hope to always retain. Tell him from me, to keep out of the bear's clutches now. Command me ever, as always,

Your faithful,

"Wittgenstein.

"P S.—I suppose I will have to try and find a wife for poor Luboff,—who seems to have no luck in love! But, he does well at cards! W."

Joyous letters came soon from Serge and Vera; for the electric spark had been faithful, and, similar greetings poured in from all our devoted ones; and, still no sign from Trepoff! A few days more passed in a veiled agony. I received his secret New York dispatch to me. His arrival was announced and immediate departure for the West. I was bidden to hold this sacredly a secret. I knew too well the pride and tenderness which would keep the manly soldier from claiming as a debt the love which he craved to win from a free woman. And, the falcon's wings were not clipped now! She was a loving goddess in waiting! Our mariners were all soon disposed of. Captain Bill Barker was now the happy possessor of his double compensation. The remainder of the charter was also presented to him. In two weeks, accompanied by Von Krusenstern, he took the water witch quietly away toward the northward! His own chosen men went with him. I am afraid that some rich sables and glossy otter skins I saw later in the fall, were an unconscious present from the Emperor of Russia! Sundry thousands of seal skins also looked as if they came from the Komandorski group; but, the taciturn Captain Bill maintained always that he "found them!" So he did, and he was very careful not to let the cruisers of the Czar find him while finding them! The magic "Bonanza" was painted a glossy black on this visit, and carried topsails, prudentially. She disclaimed any kinship with the white rover which carried away Luboff's prospective bride, as all her dainty racing rig was now laid away! She was the fishing schooner "Restless, of Yokohama," on this cruise; and, a very willful witch! My personal jealousy of Madame la Comtesse Arline was such that my "Blue Eyes" knew from my small curtain lectures. I feared I had now lost all influence. For, she was soon strangely shy and reserved, even with me! I received a dispatch soon to meet Trepoff at Sacramento; and, I did steal away! I was successful in defying these two women of genius—my new wife and her adopted sister. I stole away and soon met the tall distinguished-looking foreigner, who was now shorn of the panoply of war. Even "the great white cross" was ab-

sent from the soldier's breast. It was an incognito, for the Russian Consul General was eager and sharp eyed. Dimitri was the very incarnation of health and spirits! The four hours' voyage to the city was all too short for our colloquies. We approached the cozy nest of our graceful captive, and made a silent descent thereon! We threaded the corridors of the great hotel. As we drew near to our apartments, I heard Arline's thrilling voice. We stole into my room, and the eager Trepoff paused and grew pale. The man who had boldly faced the Turkish sabers quivered like a leaf as her voice rang out in a passionate appeal. For, he knew that voice spoke to him alone! The rippling music of the keys bore on its bosom her waiting sigh for the loved one whom her lips would not name! The song we heard now was one that she had sung once to us on the Admiralty quai by the Neva—an old Tzigane air. I stole to the door and softly opened it! The exquisite melody died away in a sigh. Her face, turned away from the portal, was buried in her hands! Laying my hand lightly on her shoulder, I said, "Arline!" Her wondering eyes met mine. She read their veiled promise, and sprang lightly to her feet. "In the name of the Czar!" said I, as Dimitri passed me. The pilgrims of love were in each other's arms! And, I had vanished before he spoke, as she lay sobbing on his breast! I stole away in search of my bride. It was some time when we were called in by the radiant Major. For their joy must needs be shared with those who held her dear. Arline received me with her drooping lashes veiling those splendid eyes, which had gazed so sadly out on the lonely Siberian snows. But, in their clear depths, when she raised her stately head, I could read that Dimitri Trepoff's question had been answered at last! In all the loving pride and tenderness they showed me, as they rested on the "brother of her adoption," her "fellow prisoner," there was a reward for my wasted months. For, I loved the man to whom she had now sworn to give back a life for a life! I could see no shadow of a parting, for their love had been tried as by fire, and the Czar's soldier had gained his proudest victory! Palace

and prison, sorrow and absence, danger and delay, were all forgotten now! In this moment the world was a paradise for these dreaming lovers. And, I lingered still in its magic mazes, with my own happy counselor of the heart! There was a silent rapture in the moments, as they flew unheeded by, for the dark shadows of the sad winter were all rolled away far behind the portals of this happy day. The winds sweeping down from the crested Sierras sang a welcome to the "Star of Poland!" They breathed a blessing from on high upon these lovers so long parted. It was at last "through night to light!" Quand même!

A light foot was on the door step! "The woman" who had trusted me in my dark days entered. Stealing up to her wayward sister, the once imperious bright-eyed falcon, she saw that the last and greatest gift of God, the perfect love which abideth, had come to the impassioned wanderer! Arline, who had loved her own conquered far off land, with the affection of all her gallant race, had found a new bond to life!

Silken chains bound our beautiful wanderer now! The Star of Poland yielded to a Russian tyrant at last. Not the great Czar, but loyal Dimitri Trepoff!

And, Trepoff at once proved himself a tyrant! For, he said, with a strange glance at Arline: "I am so happy at your arrival, Madame Grahame, for you have married one of the prison mates, and I wish you both to witness my marriage with the other!" In the silence, I saw that Arline Lazienska's bosom was heaving now in a strange emotion, and her eyes, too, were downcast! "When does it occur, Colonel Trepoff?" said I, emphasizing his new rank; for, I feared her self-abnegation—his future! "To-morrow!" he answered, with all a soldier's prompt decision. A little hand stole into his, and I heard the whisper, "Dimitri! Your rank, your career!" I lingered near them, breathlessly waiting. He laughed happily as he drew both her hands to his lips and kissed them!" The pardon for Hermione de Vries was on its way to General Mouravieff, at Irkutsk, when you escaped; so, Luboff's clumsy report will never leave Habarofka! For, you were legally free then, thanks to



the gentle Czarina! But, if retaken, you would have forfeited all your rights to grace. Could you not have trusted me a month longer?" Arline smiled up, brightly and bravely, through her tears. "I wanted to leave you free, to continue your career! Now, I will not be your ruin! Think of what you give up for me! An Empress' favor! The Czar's confidence!"

"I think that I can subject myself to the risk!" answered Trepoff. "For, I have a year's special duty in Washington, and also, the imperial permission to marry Countess Arline Lazienska Oborska, who was never cooped up in the 'polygon' on the Neva!" She answered softly, "And, so then, I must really obey you, in your foolish eagerness!" She was standing now by his side, and I could not see her face, as he answered, "Most decidedly! I insist upon it! And, it is the only favor that I have ever asked of you!" It was an undeniable statement! And, then and there, before the new American branch of her strange family, Arline looked up frankly into her lover's eyes. She essayed to speak, while we all watched her little rebellion of a moment.

"There is my hand!" she faltered; and, we stole out and left her clasped to his bosom, in her loving submission to the brave soldier's will!

THE END.

Gold Medals, Paris, 1878 : 1889.

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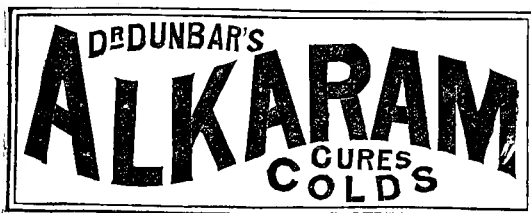
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